

The Aftermath of Abuse—How Abused Women in Hong Kong Reconstruct Their Identities in a Mutual Help Center

Hui Sio Ieng

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy
in
Anthropology

©The Chinese University of Hong Kong
September 2004

The Chinese University of Hong Kong holds the copyright of this thesis. Any person(s) intending to use a part or whole of the materials in the thesis in a proposed publication must seek copyright release from the Dean of the Graduate School.



Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgement	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
The Narrative Identities Of Abused Women In Hong Kong	
—How Do They Articulate Their Past, Present, and Future?	
Literature Review	
A Few Words about Myself and AH	
Methodology	
Organization of The Thesis	
Chapter 2:	32
What Is Special About AH?	
—Understanding AH In The Context Of the Larger Hong Kong Society	
The Cultural Expectation And Status of Hong Kong Women	
The Cultural Image And Social Position Of Abused Women	
in Hong Kong	
About AH	
Conclusion	
Chapter 3:	60
How does AH Resocialize Its Members?	
—Three Levels Of Identity Reconstruction In AH	
Hiu Man's Story	
Mandy's Story	
Analysis	
Conclusion	
Chapter 4:	89
How Members Accept, Contest Or Reject AH's Ideology?	
Ah Wai's Story	
Ah Yee's Story	
Analysis	
Conclusion	
Chapter 5:	110
Social Relationships In AH	
The Ideal Social Structure And Ideological Milieu Of AH	
Sally's Story	
Ah Ling's Story	
Analysis	
Conclusion	
Chapter 6: Conclusion	130
Is AH's Identity Reconstruction Successful?	
Narratives, Self-Identity And Cultural Construction	
The Narrative Identity of "Abused Women" in AH's term	

The Successful Aspects of AH’s identity Reconstruction
The Unsuccessful Aspects Of AH’s identity Reconstruction
What Have We Learned From AH’s Identity Reconstruction?

Appendix	151
Bibliography	154

Abstract of thesis entitled:

The Aftermath of Abuse—How Abused Women in Hong Kong Reconstruct Their Identities in a Mutual Help Center

Submitted by Hui Sio Ieng

For the degree of Master of Philosophy in Anthropology
at The Chinese University of Hong Kong in July 2002

First, I seek to examine how abused women reconstruct their narrative identities—ways of interpreting the past, rationalizing the present and seeking alternatives for the future—in a local abused women center called Angel House. In Hong Kong, women are socialized to believe that the identity of wife is all-important for a woman. However, their taken-for-granted assumptions about life are destroyed after the experience of abuse. Yet, they may be able to develop new ways of interpretation, as influenced by their social world, to make sense of their lives. Angel House is a feminist center that aims to reshape abused women from being a typical wife to becoming an independent woman. In this thesis, I investigate how it does so.

Second, I aim to study how abused women in Angel House negotiate their identities during the process of identity reconstruction. In Hong Kong, stigma is often attached to abused women because their experience contradicts the social expectation of women—that women should stick to wifedom. However, in Angel House, the abused women are resocialized to question these expectations. They seem to be caught between the dynamics of the larger society and Angel House. How do they cope with these dynamics? How do these women accept, contest or resist their new identities as shaped, in part, by Angel House?

Third, I seek to discuss the successful and unsuccessful aspects of the identity reconstruction in Angel House. Can it truly provide an alternative framework for members to narrate the past, present and future of their lives? I

will also discuss what this identity reconstruction teaches us about abused women in Hong Kong and elsewhere.

摘要

本論文探討於本地一所名為「天使屋」的互助被虐婦女中心裡，被虐婦女如何重建其「自述身份」。在香港，很多女性因社教化而相信「妻子」這身份對她們來說是極其重要。然而，當被虐婦女經歷被虐事件後，以往她們視為理所當然的觀念會受到嚴重衝激。她們會以新的世界觀及自述方法，來理解不同的生活經驗。「天使屋」是一所提倡女性主義的被虐婦女中心，它的目標是提升被虐婦女的意識，使她們成為自主女性。到底「天使屋」如何改造被婦女的身份呢？

本論文研究的另一課題是，被虐婦女面對「天使屋」的身份再建構時，如何認同、反抗或拒絕。在香港，被虐婦女一般也面對社會歧視，因為她們不能滿足社會要求女性當妻子的期望。相反，「天使屋」卻教導被虐婦女質疑這些主流觀點。被虐婦女面對大社會和「天使屋」的不同文化與價值，如何改變自己的「自述身份」？

本論文還會探討「天使屋」於再建構被虐婦女的身份的過程中，有那些地方是成功，那些是不成功。「天使屋」能提供新的認知框架，讓被虐婦女自述她們的過去、現在與將來嗎？「天使屋」的經驗對於我們了解被香港及其他地方的虐婦女，有何啟發呢？

Acknowledgment

This thesis is not simply the product of my own hard work, but also that of many people, who deserve my deepest gratitude. I must thank all the abused women in Angel House, my field site. They showed me what I myself have not yet experienced in life—sadness, betrayal and unfairness. However, they also taught me what energy, courage and strength is.

I must thank my dad, who passed away last year. I am sure he would be the happiest one to learn that I have finished my thesis. Without his support and care in the past twenty three years, I would not have a chance to enter graduate school or to live as I do. Also, I must thank my mum who tried her best to take care of me when I lived away from home. Her bravery to overcome difficulties in life, especially when my father was ill, has set a perfect example for me, so that I could finish my thesis with the same endurance.

I could not have finished this thesis if without the guidance and support from my supervisor, Prof. Gordon Mathews. He is a considerate, inexhaustible and conscientious teacher. My gratitude to him can hardly be captured by words.

I also want to thank my thesis committee members, Prof. Maria Tam and Prof. Sidney Cheung, as well as other teachers in the Anthropology Department, Prof. Tan Chee Ben, Prof. Joseph Bosco and Prof. Tracy Lu. They have shown me what Anthropology is. Besides, the administrative team in the Anthropology Department, which includes Grace, Mr Lam, Florence and Ah Wah, has been very supportive to me in these two years. A Million thanks to them!

Chapter One: Introduction

The Narrative Identities Of Abused Women In Hong Kong—How Do They Articulate Their Past, Present, and Future?

This research examines how abused women in a local mutual help center, “Angel House”,¹ (abbr. AH) utilize in various degrees its cultural and ideological knowledge to reconstruct their narrative identities—ways of interpreting the past, rationalizing the present and seeking alternatives for the future—after a tremendous crisis in life. Being abused is more than bruises and pains; along with it come substantial changes in the whole identity of abused women. These women have been forcibly expelled from their previous social role of wives. Most of them have turned from being married into being divorced, being a housewife into being unemployed, and being socially normal into being marginal. The abuse they encountered and the change in their social role have striking impacts on their self-understanding, and their taken-for-granted perception of, as well as actions in, the world.

The change in social roles and self-understanding as encountered by abused women can be understood in terms of a larger theoretical framework. As Johnson and Ferraro point out,

The self is not fixed but continually changes and adapts to new situations. The self is essentially open to the world of experience, both positive and negative.

¹ In order to protect the identity of my informants, pseudonyms have been created for the mutual help center and for the informants throughout this thesis.

When the existential self is confronted with challenging or taxing circumstances, it does not usually recoil or shatter. Instead, it struggles to incorporate new experiences into its evolving reality (Johnson and Ferraro 1984: 119).

Putting this in the context of abused women, I argue that abused women's self identity will likely change after the abuse because their self-understandings are not static and they will reflexively integrate new experiences into their lives.

Many scholars have captured the insight that sudden agony and turmoil in life brings about changes in one's narratives and self-understanding (see Gubrium 1989, 1991; Gubrium and Holstein, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2001; Dean 1998; Giddens 1991; Freeman 1993; Lawless 2001; Rosewald and Ochberg 1992; Mattingly and Garro 2000; Linde 1993). Therefore I suggest that the abusive experience of abused women will lead to a change in how they narrate their lived experiences, and thus their self-identities. Linking the theoretical perspective of Johnson and Ferraro and those narrative scholars, this study is about how abused women in Angel House (AH) rebuild their narrative identities—how they construct their identities through reflexive story-telling of their lived experiences, in the wake of agony and turmoil. This research is important because it helps us to understand abused women in Hong Kong. More particularly it shows how the traumatized and stigmatized women in Hong Kong rebuild their narrative identities in an effort to adjust to the discrepancies between their previous ideals and present reality; and it unravels how our sense of self is shaped by the culture of the larger society and reshaped by the sub-culture² of a distinct community.

Before going any further, let me discuss some key terms—narratives, narrative

² AH is a sub-culture in the sense that its ideas, practices, organizational settings and language are quite different from the dominant culture of the larger society.

identity and abused women. Throughout this thesis, “narratives” are seen as one’s stories about oneself, no matter how minor or how important they are. Narrative identity is the reflexive self constantly created and sustained through storytelling. Giddens (1991) points out that reflexivity and creativity are primary elements of self-identity. Other scholars, like Mattingly and Garro (2000), Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992), Dean (1998), Lawless (2001), and Gubrium and Holstein (1995), more specifically suggest that narrative and story telling are important for formulating a reflexive and creative self-identity. Abused women in this thesis means victims who have suffered by any acts enacted by their spouses, intimate partners, cohabitants or any other family members, which has resulted in psychological, physical, or sexual suffering.³ This includes physical attack, sexual violations, repeated verbal abuse, deprivation of liberty, financial and personal resources and so forth.

AH⁴ (Angel House) members’ narratives are bounded by cultures. These women encounter two salient cultures in daily life—the culture of the larger society in Hong Kong and the sub-culture of AH—which differ immensely or even contradict each other in some respects. The former socializes women to take up the role of obedient wife and caring mother as their central identities while the latter challenges this socialization and its settings. AH emphasizes the rights of abused women and the empowerment of members through mutual help, self-help and

³ This definition of abuse is in reference to Haley and Haley (2000), Yllo (1993), McCue (1995), and Hirschmann (2003).

⁴ “AH” is the abbreviation of Angel House, my field site. In AH, abused women are seen as “members” instead of “clients” This is related to the ideology and social structure of AH, which sees abused women as equal partners for pursuing policy changes, instead of clients who just come for help. This will be further explained in chapter two.

self-governance by members. It aims to transform “ostensibly abused women” (Loseke 2001: 12)—women with abusive experiences who do not subjectively identify themselves as abused women—into “AH abused women” whose identity is based upon their abusive experiences and whose narratives are framed in AH’s definitions.

The cultural expectations of Hong Kong women are heavily influenced by the traditional Chinese values and the patriarchal nature of Hong Kong (see Tang 1999a; Mackay and Lo 1985; Tang, Lee and Cheung 1999; Tang, Wong and Cheung 2002; Tang and Tang 2001). Husbands and families are still seen as of prime importance for Hong Kong women and they are socialized to believe in the role of wife and mother. They may take on these established social roles as their master identities through which they reference their life experiences and narrate their biographical history. Ng (2003b) has analyzed eleven surveys concerning domestic responsibilities that were conducted from 1982 to 1997.⁵ He finds out that many women still believe they are the most suitable for taking up housework (2003b: 89). This coincides with what Goffman says in his books: individuals are mobilized to take up social roles that are prescribed by society as their selves and they consciously present themselves as such in daily life (Goffman 1973, 1982). As Goffman puts it, with reference to Park, “it is in these [social] roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves” (cited by Goffman 1973: 19). Similarly, it is in these social roles of wife and mother that many Hong Kong women know themselves and it is these roles through which they make sense of their lives (see Tang and Tang 2001: 182, Cheung,

⁵ These seven surveys include Boys’ and Girls’ Association of Hong Kong (1984, 1990), Chu (1997), Chu and Leung (1995), Hong Kong Young Women’s Christian Association and Hong Kong Shue Yan College (1982), Lam (1982), Lee (1992), Lit (1991), Tuen Mun District Board (1991), and Lau and Wan (1987).

Lai, Au, and Ngai 1997).

However, being abused at the hands of their partners, who are culturally expected to be reliable, trustworthy and caring as husbands, smashes the ideals that were once held by many abused women. Furthermore, being abused itself is a stigma in Hong Kong society (Tang, Lee and Cheung 1999: 53; Cheung, De Dios, Karlekar and Vichit-Vadakan 1999:9; Chan and Chan 2003: 531), because abused women are viewed by this patriarchal society as failing to fulfill the cultural norm—that women should stick to their social role of being a submissive wife and nurturing mother—even though the perpetrator is the one who is at fault⁶ (see Tang and Tang 2001: 182). How do abused women manage to deal with the cultural norms that were once taken-for-granted to them, yet now have become incongruous with their experiences? How do they cope with the enormous gap between present reality and previous ideals about family and marriage as prescribed by the patriarchal society? How does AH influence their views on all these matters?

AH aims to make “AH abused women” members’ master identity so that they will see the world and their lives in AH’s terms. Members are encouraged to express themselves in AH’s special cultural environment. They recount their abusive experience, their present life, their struggle for social resources, their social life in AH and so forth in numerous circumstances provided by AH, such as in meetings, focus groups, private conversation, interviews, and in the media. This kind of narration reveals how members cope with their lives and reconstruct their narrative identities through AH’s influence in the wake of the abuse.

⁶ In Hong Kong, people’s reaction towards wife abuse varies with the degree of violence inflicted upon abused women. If an abused woman is seriously hurt because an abuser tries to kill her, the larger society usually will denounce the abusive acts. However, if an abused woman is not seriously hurt, Hong Kong people tend to condone the abuser; some may even think that there must be some problems with the abused woman, who is seen to be causing the violence in part.

The central concerns of my thesis are these: how do members of AH, wherein particular interpretive resources are available, reconstruct their narrative identities in such a way that their past, present and future can be made sense of? How do they negotiate with the cultural norms of the broader society by strategically and selectively accepting, contesting and rejecting the narrative identity of “abused women” in AH’s terms? In what ways are they caught between the dynamics of the larger society and AH? What interpretive resources are available in AH’s particular cultural milieu? How are members’ identity reconstructions unfolded in relation to AH’s interpretive resources and that of the wider community? Considering these questions allows us to reflect on the social and cultural norms that are imposed upon us in everyday life. It seems that many abused women can no longer make sense of their lives through the cultural norms of the larger society; AH appears to provide another framework that makes their narratives possible and sensible. But is this true? Is the identity of “AH abused women” a better, and more effective narrative framework for its members? What are the implications of members’ identity reconstruction in AH? These are the questions that I explore in this thesis.

Literature Review

Literature of Hong Kong Women

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries

In traditional Chinese society, including Hong Kong, women were once highly exploited in being San Po Tsai (young girls being sent to the households of future husbands who were often younger than these girls were), Mui Tsai (young women sold to a family as servants), Pipa Tsai (girls sold as entertainers), prostitution and so forth (Jaschok and Miers 1994). Many scholars described these women as passive

victims; however Jaschok and Miers have illustrated that they did try to escape from these forms of servitude, challenging and changing the patriarchal system. For example, women would be looked down upon if they did not get married; however, some married women tried to escape from patriarchal domination by delaying the time before they had to live with their husbands.

The 1970-1980s: Industrial Hong Kong

Salaff (1981) and Sheridan and Salaff (1984) studied how industrialization and modernization have altered the structure of the traditional Chinese family in Hong Kong during 1970s and 1980s. In traditional Chinese society, young daughters had to obey their fathers and brothers. Young married women were also subordinated to their husband families; they gained ascendancy only when they became the oldest generation in their families (Salaff 1981). Besides, Salaff suggested that the Hong Kong Chinese family had adopted the “family wage economy”, which meant that all members were expected to contribute financially to their family. Daughters, who were seen as a loss to their families when they got married, were also fully expected to follow the rules and expectations of their own families and had to fulfill their filial piety by giving a huge proportion of salaries to their families.

However, in the 1970s and 1980s, Hong Kong relied heavily on export-driven industrialization, which created lots of employment for female labor. Expanded female employment was alleged to have increased women’s power in their family, or even shaken up the Chinese hierarchical family structure. Also, capitalist economic forces, such as advertisements and western pop music encouraged young people to put personal freedom as a high priority, Salaff suggested.

Daughters’ expected obedience to their families and their personal desires as fostered by industrialization have put them into conflict. Salaff wrote that their

families have great control over the newly gained labor power of female daughters and the status of female daughters in their families had not been significantly improved. It is undeniable that they experienced life improvement, like higher education and being wage earners, but men still had higher social status and power than women. However, women did fight for their own opportunities in “marriage choice, the utilization of personal earnings, peer-group activities, and affections and prestige within the family of orientation” (Salaff 1981: 12). This shows that women wage earners seldom entirely submitted to their families’ needs, rather they fought for individual freedom to different degrees, in accordance with their family structure (such as their birth order), their economic status (is their family wealthy or not), and their own personality.

1990s Hong Kong

In the 1990s, there were many studies of gender relationship in Hong Kong. To specify just one, of some relevance to my own research, Tam (1996) studied the *bau yilai* phenomenon (keeping a mistress, a “second wife” in China) in Hong Kong. Having a mistress, or *yilai*, was quite normal in traditional Chinese society, which symbolizes men’s wealth and status. Tam argues that Hong Kong society condones the revival of polygyny; for example, many people believes that men have greater sexual needs and thus it is forgivable to keep a mistress if they work in China, but women should be loyal to their husbands under any circumstances; some blame the legal wives for not keeping an attractive look. Tam argues that all these “mark a resumption of gender hierarchy in favor of male dominance in the domestic arena” (1996: 130).

The three sections above show the different cultural context of patriarchal domination in three major periods of Hong Kong development. They also reveal how

different generations of Hong Kong women have understood and lived out gender relations and family roles.

Literature of Hong Kong Abused Women

Although recently much more attention has been paid to Hong Kong abused women, research in this area is still very limited, in both quantity and variety. Very often, wife abuse is mentioned in juxtaposition with other forms of violence against women, such as rape and pornography. For instance, Tang, Cheung, Chen and Sun (2002) investigate how people from Hong Kong, China and Taiwan perceive the term “violence against women”, but do not look on the specifics of wife abuse. (See also Tang 1999b, Tang, Wong and Cheung 2002).

For literature that talks about abused women directly, one of the major areas is the prevalence, pattern and severity of abuse (see Mackay and Lo 1985, Tang 1994). For example, Tang proposes that egalitarian decision power among couples leads to marital satisfaction while marital aggression relates to imbalanced decision power (Tang 1999b). Therefore, she suggests that there should be more family education programs to promote egalitarian ideology

Another major area of literature on Hong Kong abused women is about social policies for abused women. For example, Chan and Chan (2003) argue that the housing policies and other services for abused women in Hong Kong lead to social exclusion of these women in the name of social inclusion. This, they suggest, creates further burdens for abused women. Other area of literature on abused women study the impact of abuse on women and their children, research usually done from a psychological perspective (See Tang 1997).

Most of the research about Hong Kong abused women is limited to types, causes, severity, pattern, predictors, impact and prevention of abuse. Their primary

goals are to understand wife abuse and seek ways to eliminate it. They are useful and pragmatic, yet a crucial aspect has been left blank thus far, which is the long-term aftermath of abuse—how do Hong Kong abused women resettle their life after their abusive experience in order to cope with the future? Also none of this research has studied the identity reconstruction of these women through a narrative approach. My research aims to offer such perspective by studying how AH abused women reconstruct their narrative identities by selectively and strategically adopting the ideology of the larger Hong Kong society and that of AH.

On Western Literature Concerning Abused Women

There is an abundant Western literature on abused women. Let me now briefly discuss some crucial aspects of this literature.

Does wife abuse only include physical aggression?

There are debates about whether wife abuse should only take physical violence into account, or should include psychological and sexual violence as well. Some scholars say wife abuse should only include physical aggression (see Dutton 1995:2). They suggest that to include psychological violence, verbal abuse and other less visible violence into wife abuse will be opposed by non-feminists in society because these types of violence are amorphous. This will distract social attention from the serious physical assaults inflicted upon women.

Another group of scholars (see Sev'er 1997: 5, Haley and Haley 2000, Yllo 1993, McCue 1995, Hirschmann 2003) hold different opinions. They think wife abuse should include all forms of violence, including psychological, verbal and sexual violence. They argue that although these types of violence are less visible than physical violence, they have the same ill effects on abused women and they should

be directly addressed, and considered as wife abuse.

Should we call it “wife abuse” or “family violence”?

Some scholars, especially those who are from the University of New Hampshire’s Family studies program, see wife abuse in terms of family violence, and seem to assume that there is gender neutrality when studying family violence. What they focus on is the dynamics inside a family, and social attitudes towards violence (see Kelly 1997: 28). However, some other scholars insist that wife abuse is different from family violence. For example, Kelly (1997) suggests that the family violence researchers seem unaware of the unequal power relationships between men and women; they treat men and women as having equal power and status (see also Yllo 1993; Counts, Brown and Campbell 1992: 234; Haley and Haley 2000; McCue 1995). These wife abuse researchers believe that men try to gain control and dominance over women by performing violent acts in patriarchal society.

Why do abused women stay in a violent relationship? Are they victims or agents?

Walker (1984) suggests that abused women who have suffered from continuous assault learn to be “helpless” and “passive”—abused women can do nothing to prevent the violence, and furthermore when they have a chance to escape an abusive relationship they do not usually grasp it. This is what Walker called “Learned Helplessness”. However, many scholars have later pointed out that Walker describes abused women as if they are passive victims; he pays no attention to abused women’s power over their lives, no matter how small their power might be. Also, Walker’s theory of “learned helplessness” emphasizes the personality problems of abused women, who are seen as lacking the psychological power to leave the abuser; it does not address the larger social and cultural causes of wife abuse (Kirkwood 1993: 10).

Many scholars suggest that “learned helplessness” is not the reason that abused women stay in violent relationships. These scholars argue that abused women are active agents who are well aware of their own situation and have their own reasoning process; abused women stay with the abusers because there is insufficient social support for abused women to run away (see Hirschmann 1995, Herzberger 1996, Kirkwood 1993). For instance, Herzberger (1996) suggests that lack of support from police and social services hinders abused women from leaving the abuser. Abused women might fear that failure in running away from abusers will escalate violence; therefore they choose to stay in abusive relationships if there is not enough social support.

Also, many scholars have started to emphasize that abused women are survivors, rather than pure victims, as was described by Walker (Hoff 1990, Stanko 1985). For example, Kirkwood writes that “unlike victimization, in which the agent is the abuser, the agent of survival is the abused women. Thus women are often simultaneously victimized and actively surviving” (Kirkwood 1993: 137). Abused women, these scholars suggest, have survived abuse and are able to start a new life; they are seen to be using their own power to stop the violent acts of the abusers.

Different Ways To Conceptualize Wife Abuse

There are different frameworks to understand wife abuse. (See Gelles 1993; Counts, Brown & Campbell: 1992). The psychological perspective is the earliest understanding of wife abuse, which attributes violent acts solely to psychological disorder and individual pathology. For example, O’ Leary suggests that the more serious the abuse is, the more likely that the abuser has some kind of psychological pathology (1993). Challenging the psychological perspective, the sociological approach focuses on how social structure exercises influences on people’s behavior

and causes the violent acts of abusers. This approach studies how different social institutions, such as family, are established in ways that instigates violence among family members (Gelles 1993). For instance, Goode's resources theory suggests that people with rich resources are less likely to deploy force openly, thus less likely to perform abusive acts (Goode, 1971; Okun: 1986); Gelles' social control theory suggests that abusive acts are calculations of cost and rewards; abuse is likely to happen when reward is greater than costs. The particular natures of family, plus indifferent response from the social and legal institutions lower the risks of abuse and raise the rewards for violence (Gelles 1983). However, it seems that the calculations that abusers make are not necessarily so rigid and automatic, and abusers might create violence from irrational reasons, rather than calculating their behavior, as the social control theory indicates.

With a different focus from the psychological and sociological approaches, the feminist perspective directs attention to how our world is built up on a gender basis in ways that violence by men against women is encouraged. The basic feminist explanation for wife abuse is the husband's control over his wife, backed by a social structure that allows her husband to do so. For example, Johnson and Ferraro (1999) suggest the ideology of male dominance as inherent in patriarchal society strongly influencing the development of male identity. When men feel threatened in an area that they view as critical for the survival of self, such as loyalty of the spouse, their "reactions to threat are particularly unpredictable and uncontrollable" (1999: 128) and the husbands will seek control over his wife, perhaps in the form of violence. One of the major differences between the feminist perspective and the psychological and sociological approaches is that the feminist perspective focuses primarily on the unequal power relationships between men and women (see for example Yllo 1993; Count, Brown and Campbell 1992; Haley and Haley 2000; McCue 1995) whereas

the psychological and sociological perspective also focus on other kinds of violence, like sibling abuse, elderly abuse and so forth (Gelles 1993: 42).

There are scholars who emphasize the cultural aspect of wife abuse, which is to take the cultural influences and complexity of a specific society into consideration when doing research, and conduct cross-cultural comparisons. For instance, Brown (1997) explores the role of mothers-in-law in wife abuse in various non-industrial societies. She finds that in societies where mothers-in-law act as peacemakers between their sons and their wives, wife abuse is relatively uncommon. However, in societies where mothers-in-law act as agitators, such as being picky with their daughters-in-law, wife abuse is more common. Brown also suggest that wives who have support from female kin, who have significant economic power, and who can form intergenerational alliances with elder female kin, are less likely to suffer from wife abuse (Brown 1997: 93). Also, Counts, Brown and Campbell (1992) conducted cultural comparison of wife abuse in fifteen countries and found that cultures play an important role in understanding and accounting for the prevalence of wife abuse. First, they suggest that wife beating should be distinguished from wife battering. Wife beating is a form of aggression which is customary and seen as unremarkable whereas wife battering is violence, which is viewed as unusual. They find that different societies have different attitudes towards wife beating and wife battering. Some rebuke both forms of violence, some condone all, and some accept wife beating while reprimanding wife battering.

Counts, Brown and Campbell evaluate some of the Western social science theories that account for wife beating, such as the feminist perspective, resource theory, which says that people who have more resources are less likely to use force in an open manner (Gelles 1993: 37), and so forth, with the cultural evidence they have collected. This evidence, they argue, does not fully support any of these theories over

others. Instead, they suggest that these theories all have a certain degree of validity, yet there is no universal theory that can explain the wide range patternings of wife beating or wife battering in different cultures. For instance, it is usually believed by feminists that women who have power outside the home, such as that of economics or magic are less likely to suffer from wife battering. Counts, Brown and Campbell suggest that in the fifteen countries they investigated, eight fit into this argument.⁷ In other societies, but, this is not true. In Taiwan and among the Indo-Fijians, economic power of wives increases but the incidence of battering does not drop (Counts, Brown and Campbell 1992: 236).

Situating my research in the wife abuse literature

The psychological, social and feminist perspectives seek to account for wife abuse, yet none of them are complete or universal. To do research on wife abuse, these approaches should be utilized when appropriate to complement each other. Above all, a cultural perspective is indispensable, since patterns of wife abuse in different cultures vary and have different characteristics. In light of this, my research will be conducted from an anthropological perspective. It will be based on the particular cultural context of Hong Kong to discuss the identity reconstruction of abused women.

On Life Stories And Narrative Identity

Narratives, life history, and life stories in anthropology

There were once many debates on the nature of life history in anthropology. Some scholars, like Franz Boas, suggested that life histories are not scientific and

⁷These include Kung of southern Africa, Wape, Garifuna, Australian Aborigine, Mayotte, Ecuador, Marshall Islanders and Garifuna.

objective; others like Paul Radin believe that “history and culture were grounded in the lives of specific individuals. Life histories revealed history and culture as lived” (Diamond 1981, cited by Peacock and Holland 1993: 367). Also, some scholars presume that reality exists external to the narration, and life histories are to at least some degree a mirror of reality (see Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992: 2), while other say that narratives construct life and the self instead of reflecting a single reality (see Spencer 1982; Schafer 1981; Wyatt 1986, cited by Peacock and Holland 1993: 370).

Peacock and Holland suggest that merit can be found in all different perspectives, but there are also insufficiencies in all of them. Peacock and Holland introduce their own perspective—the process approach, which is an effort to transcend and synthesize various approaches in life stories. Emphasizing a holistic standpoint, the process approach consists of four significant elements. Let me now discuss these four elements by going through the works of Linde (1993), Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992), and Garro and Mattingly (2000).

Reconstructing self and constructing realities

Linde (1993), and Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992), as well as Garro and Mattingly (2000) are highly cognizant that life stories are not necessarily facts or truths; instead they focus on the reconstructing power of life stories on self-understanding. (See also Frank 1995; Dean 1995, 1998; Giddens 1992; Freeman 1993; Gubrium and Holstein 1995, 1997, 2000, 2001; Lawless 2001). In her book *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence*, Linde is uninterested in judging if any events, characters or emotions are true or false. She is devoted to learning about how people create coherent life stories, thus a coherent sense of self, by utilizing different sets of beliefs and assumptions in their stories.

In their book *Narrative and the Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing*,

Mattingly and Garro say that narrative is an essential way to give meaning to human experience. They write that, “narratives are a powerful way to shape conduct because they have something to say about what gives life meaning, what is inspiring in our lives, what is dangerous and worth taking risks for” (Mattingly and Garro 2000:11). In this light, as narrative is constructed it constructs, because we tell stories that have the power to shape our consciousness and self-understanding, hence our actions, behaviors and realities (Mattingly and Garro 2000: 16).

Life stories as social and cultural constructions

Scholars not only recognize how life stories shape individual's self-understanding; they are also aware of how personal stories are shaped by social and cultural factors. Linde suggests that creating a coherent life story emerges from social and cultural demands because certain elements are supposed to be merged into life stories in a particular culture while others are not. For example, Linde suggests that one's profession is expected to be included in a middle-class American's story. Absence of this information may lead other to guess that you are doing something disgraceful (Linde 1993:8). In this sense, a life story is a social and cultural construction; what inheres in a life story of a particular culture may be dropped in other cultures; what is omitted may be included in another culture. We are not totally free to construct our own life story because cultural rules are binding us. In similar fashion, Carrithers (1992) points out that human beings are enclosed within a “large temporal envelope” (1992: 82), through which they comprehend behaviors and actions.

Rosenwald and Ochberg do not simply contend that life stories are shaped by cultural rules; they move beyond this, to make a stringent critique of the “political-cultural conditions that have led to the circumscription of discourse”

(Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992: 2). They see that some cultural and social ideologies guiding the narrative conventions are oppressive, as are the political institutions from which these ideologies are generated. However, optimistically, Rosenwald and Ochberg suggest that personal stories as well as the lives to which they attach can be liberated through critical insights. They put a spotlight on individual subjectivity, which is regarded as the restless force that resists social and cultural conventions, thus eroding the oppressive political and cultural arrangement in society. They hold the belief that individual identities, the way people communicate with each other, and indirectly the social order itself could be changed if individuals were aware of social and cultural constraints in constructing their stories.

Constructing collective identity and social relationships

Telling personal stories is a way to claim, maintain and negotiate collective membership. Linde suggests that narratives are bounded by cultural norms. In this view, having the ability to construct a coherent life story in a culturally specific manner is essential for members of a culture to appear competent and “to demonstrate that we are in fact worthy members of those groups, understanding and properly following their moral standards” (Linde 1993: 3); otherwise members may face criticisms from other members. Similar to Linde’s argument, Mattingly and Garro write that one’s socio-cultural memberships, like gender, class and profession, can be revealed through narratives, and sometimes one’s personal stories are based on wider “collective autobiography” (2000: 19).

Life stories in the context of social interaction

The formation of life stories is highly influenced by the “immediate social conditions and communicative intent” of story telling (Peacock and Holland 1993:

374). Mattingly and Garro believe that narrative is a kind of social drama, performance and contestation, which “emphasize[s] action, motive, event, and process as the key ingredients of social life” (2000: 17).

Rosenwald and Ochberg capture the insight that listeners, apart from the teller, play an influential role in creating reality in particular ways; they also suggest that the plot and flow of personal stories are limited by the expectation of others (Rosewald and Ochbery 1993: 9). Mattingly and Garro write that if stories are to have power to initiate other people to think and act in particular ways; a relationship between teller and audience must be developed, one in which the listener comes to care about the events recounted (Mattingly and Garro 2000: 11).

Situating my research in literature on narratives

The narrative identity approach and its four important elements—how narratives are constructed, how they construct realities, how they are related to social relationships, and how they are shaped by social interaction, as discussed above, —will underlie the direction of my thesis. In my research, I seek to examine how AH members’ narratives reveal the dominant cultural norms and political ideology imposed on abused women, and how AH members appropriate AH’s ideology to recreate meanings for the past, present and future through reflexive narration of different aspects of their lives. Also, I will look into how AH creates a collective identity among members by providing an “AH abused women” narrative framework, and how members utilize this narrative identity in different social conditions and with different communicative purposes.

On Identity Work In Shelters

Shelters and reducing violence

Many previous studies focus on the efficacy of shelters in eliminating wife abuse by educating the public and abused women themselves (see Tutty 1999; Austin 1999). Some use 'reduction in violence against women' as a factor in determining shelters' effectiveness; other use 'returning to abusive relationships', measuring how many abused women in a shelter reunite with their previous partners (see Gordon 1998). Counts, Brown and Campbell suggest that there is a strong relationship between the prevalence of sanctuaries for abused women, in the form of shelters in most industrialized societies, and the prevalence of wife battering (1992). These studies assume shelters to take up the role of eliminating wife abuse, but pay scarce attention to shelters' role in reconstructing the identities of abused women.

A source of external definition to the abusive experience

Johnson and Ferraro (1984; 1999) mention six ways that abused women rationalize the abuse inflicted by their spouse. They also point out that abused women will develop a victimized self—"a new feeling of being exploited and a new interpretation of the causes and consequences of the exploitation" (1984: 120)—when they experience a turning point that triggers the redefinition of abuse. Johnson and Ferraro suggest that shelters for abused women not only provide material resources, but also are one source of external definitions of the abusive experience. They write, "The goal of many shelters is to overcome feelings of guilt and inadequacy so that women can make choices in their best interests. In this atmosphere, violent incidents are reexamined and redefined as assaults in which the woman was victimized." (Johnson and Ferraro 1999: 64).

Loseke holds a similar view, that shelters and support groups "encourage women to make sense of their non-understandable lived realities by narrating their practical experiences as those of wife abuse, and simultaneously to think of their

selves as battered women and their partners as abusive men” (Loseke 2001:110).

Their views allow us to comprehend the nature of shelters; shelters are more than means to eliminate abuse. They also have a striking impact on how abused women perceive and define the abusive incidents, and themselves as human beings

A site for consciousness raising and empowerment

There are scholars emphasizing shelters as political places to empower abused women and to raise their consciousness about gender inequalities in society. For instance, Hoff remarks that abused women take charge of everything in many shelters; the role of staff and professionals are minimal. This gives them a sense of power and control over their lives (Hoff 1990).

Sattler also believes that education in shelters allows women to transcend abuse and to transform escape into freedom. It is because consciousness-raising programs in shelters create a new awareness and sensitivity in women in such a way that they will be aware of how their lives are structured and controlled by society (Sattler 2000). Profitt holds a similar point of view. She criticizes those apolitical shelters that adopt an individualized service approach in dealing with abused women. These shelters attribute the problems of abuse of women to individual and psychological reasons that only require individual intervention, like counseling. They are blind to the structural causes of the wife abuse, she writes (Profitt 2000). Profitt argues that shelters should be re-politicized to raise women’s consciousness about patriarchal society.

Reproducing the problem of wife abuse

Unlike Lee, Sattler and Profitt, Loseke holds a different view of shelters. She remarks that shelters “make up people”, that is, transform heterogeneity into

homogeneity, constructing people seeable as “abused women” from millions of women’s individual experiences, and reproducing the social collectivities of “wife abuse” and “abused women” (Loseke 1992). Therefore, wife abuse and battered women are socially constructed because shelters transform the heterogeneity of lived realities into the homogeneity of collective images, which influences how social members accept and understand the problems of wife abuse and abused women. Only those women who fit the homogenous collective representation are regarded as abused women whereas those who do not are excluded and ignored. Loseke reminds us that social problems and social structures are reproduced in this way, and we should pay attention to those who have been left out by the dominant images of “abused women”.

Loseke’s insights serve as a reminder that sometimes a shelter itself could be oppressive and repelling when doing identity work on abused women, even though it aims to fight against the oppressive forces in society.

Shelters sometimes conflict with individuals

Loseke tells another story in “Lived Realities and Formula Stories of ‘Battered Women.’” (2001) Formula stories of battered women, which are narratives about wife abuse involving “abused women” as pure victims and “abusive men” as pure villains, have become a predominant way through which abused women in shelters or support groups interpret their experience and make sense of their lives. Loseke, however, suggests that abused women in support groups “do not necessarily rely upon the group’s interpretive blueprints to format their identities and experience” (2001: 108) because their lives are far more complex and indeterminable than, and sometimes even collide with, such formula stories. Therefore, abused women may create stories that differ significantly from institutionally desired narratives; and

Loseke concludes that identities should not be imposed upon abused women's lives.

Situating my research in shelters literature

AH, the mutual help center that I study, is not a residential shelter, yet it is similar to such shelters, especially those in the West, because it, like them, aims to raise abused women's consciousness concerning gender inequality. My fieldwork has shown me that the interpersonal dynamics in AH cannot be easily summed up in the way that each of these scholars describe. It's true that AH acts as source of external definition of abuse, yet its members do not always interpret the abuse in AH's terms; it's true that while AH wants to empower its members and to raise their consciousness, it has certain oppressive elements to it; but it is also true that while AH hopes to reduce spousal violence, it creates violence in other less direct forms; and it's true that AH creates formula stories that members may reject, but they sometime actively appropriate these stories in order to gain social welfare. In this thesis, I explore AH members' identity reconstruction in light of this intricacy.

A Few Words About Myself And AH

I came to know AH two or three years ago when I was involved in the student union of my university. For a long time, I had heard about AH from my friends in the social movement circle because of its self-governance and mutual help characteristics, which many grassroots organizations want to establish. Also AH members' energy, and power are well known. I did not have an opportunity to get involved in AH until two years ago, when I was introduced by my friend to participate in an AH campaign of reviewing the Domestic Violence Ordinance in Hong Kong. This campaign required certain ability in reading and writing, but AH

members are not very well educated and they had to get help from voluntary workers who are not members. I became such a voluntary worker.

I select AH and abused women as my thesis topic not only because of the scarcity of studies of local abused women, but also because of my concern and involvement in social movements. Our society is unfair in many ways that are sustained and normalized by different ideological, political and social settings. These oppressive settings are deeply ingrained into our lives as if they are normal and sensible; and we are socialized to take them for granted and accept them without critique. However, many marginalized groups, like abused women, are deprived culturally and politically by these unfair and brutal settings. In this thesis, I want to shed light on how abused women appropriate AH's ideology in different degrees to negotiate with the larger cultural norms that are now incongruous with their experience, so that they can achieve an alternative framework for narratives which is different from that guided by the larger Hong Kong society.

Although I have a political attachment to AH and abused women, I seek to conduct my research objectively. I know very well that AH is not a perfect model and its identity reconstruction is not without problems. I believe that I can make contribution to AH and abused women only when I am able to appreciate and at the same time critique its identity reconstruction objectively and honestly.

Methodology

This thesis is written on the basis of information I gathered from participant observation, and interviews, as well as archival research.

Participant Observation

I have been a volunteer of AH for more than two years and I have offered a wide range of assistance, including looking after members' children, publishing an anti-domestic violence booklet, doing translations, participating in campaigns that seeks to initiate an anti-domestic violence law in Hong Kong, conducting interviews with members concerning Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA),⁸ organizing a computer course for them and many other activities. In a broad sense, my participant observation started two years ago. However, as an anthropology student, I know very well that I must obtain permission for doing research from my informants. Thus as soon as I decided to study AH a year and a half ago, I informed AH about my research. Since then, my participation in AH has become more intensive and in-depth, and I have done intensive participant observation from June to August 2003. I have attended AH's Monthly Members' Meeting, meetings of various focus groups, new members training sessions, different outings, demonstrations and so forth.

Participant observation has granted me opportunities to better understand AH and its members, such as how AH's staff and its members interact with each other, how AH is operated, the different social network among the members, the major conflicts in AH and so forth. More, through observation I could acquire an intuitive understanding and emic viewpoints of AH so that my data could be better contextualized and intellectualized.

⁸ Comprehensive Social Security Assistance is a part of the social welfare system in Hong Kong. It aims to help people who cannot financially support their families.

Interviews

I have conducted semi-structured interviews with two groups of people: 15 AH members, and 5 AH staff, both present and past.

There are about 50 members in AH,⁹ but not all of them are fully active in joining its activities. There are ten Executive Committee members; they are most active, and will come to AH two or three times a week. New members are usually more active than those who have been members for a long time, because AH staff offer great help for their new life. New members usually come to AH once or twice a week, while those who have been members for a long time may come back two or three times a month, depending on whether AH has organized any activities. An average of twenty five to thirty members will attend the Monthly Members' Meeting, which is obligatory unless a proper reason is provided.

I have conducted semi-structured interview with 15 members, in addition to many informal interviews. I deliberately selected informants with varying backgrounds, such as members who are raised locally in Hong Kong versus those who grew up on the Mainland; those who are more well educated versus those who are poorly educated; those who have joined AH since its establishment versus those who have joined for a year or two; and those who have a job versus those who do not; and those who have children versus those who do not.

I have interviewed 5 present and past staff of AH. Two of them were previously abused and are AH members themselves. Interviewing AH staff allows me to know

⁹ When I first did fieldwork in AH there were officially 104 members, but many of them seldom come to meetings. Later in my fieldwork, the Executive Committee suggested to implement AH's constitution, which says that members who do not attend Monthly Members Meeting for three consecutive months without a proper reason will be expelled. Therefore it now has about 50 members.

their views on the ideology of AH and its members, and how they themselves feel about raising members' consciousness.

In order to enable my informants to freely frame their experiences, I did not take an active role in the interviews other than asking basic questions, though I probed sometimes when my informants needed help to continue their narratives. The major focus of the interviews was as follows:

The experience of being abused

How did AH members narrate their past experiences of being abused? Who should bear the responsibility for the abuse? They themselves? Their ex-husbands? Society? Are there any differences in these narrations in different contexts, for example, in AH's formal meetings, informal occasions among AH members, and in front of the mass media? What accounts for these variations?

Family

Do AH members still think that an ideal family with a wife, a husband and children is important for them? What is the most important thing to them after the abuse? Their children? Money? Relatives and friends? AH?

Love relationships with men

What are/were their attitudes towards men? Are there any significant changes in their attitudes? Do they want/dare to get married again?

Stigma

Do they think they are stigmatized? How they cope with such stigma? What they think are the causes of such stigma? Is it because of being abused women? Of being single mothers at present? Of receiving social welfare?

Social and political rights as women

What are their views concerning government policies in helping abused women, such as the social welfare system in Hong Kong? Do they think the government understands the situation of abused women? Why? Why not?

Participation in AH

To what extent do they agree with AH's ideology? And how do they practise them themselves? Why do they still stay in AH?

Future

What are their dreams? What kind of future life do they seek?

Of course, the questions I asked in interviews were much simpler than the wordings I indicate above, so that the women I spoke with could clearly understand and answer them. All interviews lasted from one and a half hours up to four hours. All were audio-recorded and fully transcribed. The names of informants are pseudonyms, and some aspects of their information have been fictionalized so as to protect my informants.

Archival Research

I conducted archival research to find out more about the general situation of wife abuse in Hong Kong, as well as information about AH. I have searched through

newspapers, documents and reports issued by AH, over the past five years, as well as other agencies dealing with abused women, and the HKSAR government.¹⁰

Narrative Approach

My major focus in this thesis is to explore how AH abused women make use of its ideology to reconstruct their narrative identities; therefore my discussion in this thesis is interwoven with members' narratives about different aspects of their lives. I assume their stories are in conjunction with reality, yet I do not stand by the accuracy of what I have been told. What I am interested in is how members' narratives reflect the ways they view and represent themselves and different events from their own perspectives and subjectivity. This can reveal how they negotiate their narrative identities in the dynamics of AH and the wider society.

I am cognizant that the narratives of AH members in this thesis are not the mere products of their tellers. I, as a researcher, have also taken part in their formations by asking my informant specific questions, giving different responses to their stories during interviews, and so on. Also, in this thesis I have the power to edit the stories of my informants, such as shortening their stories and adding supplementary information to them. All these factors inevitably make me one of the creators, though not the most important one, of AH members' narratives. However, I try to present honestly what I have observed in AH. I hope that the voices of my informants can be truly, if not entirely, presented in my thesis.

¹⁰ I have searched through two types of documents and report. The first type of document is about wife abuse in Hong Kong, such as the number of cases of wife abuse reported in the past ten years, how the mass media depict wife abuse and so forth. The second type of information is about AH, such as its history, what it has done, and so forth.

The fifteen informants who I have interviewed are not necessarily representative of Hong Kong abused women. However they definitely help us to learn more about what difficulties Hong Kong abused women encounter after leaving their abusers, how they cope with the social stigma attached to abuse, and how they rebuild their lives and resettle themselves in the wake of abuse.

Organization of The Thesis

There are three main themes—relationships with their family, including husband and children, struggles in getting social welfare, and social relationships in AH—in members' stories, as I will elicit them in the following chapters. The coming chapters will be devoted to these themes in order to capture how AH members reconstruct their narrative identities: some members, whom I call believers, accept and weave AH cultural ideologies into their narratives; other, whom, I call skeptics, partially accept and partially contest the identity of "AH abused women"—they still hold onto some of the cultural norms in the wider community; still others, whom I call non-believers, totally reject the cultural ideologies of AH. Narratives on these main themes can serve as a window to understand not only these women themselves, but also the political, social and cultural settings of the larger society and of AH.

In chapter two, I will discuss the cultural expectations placed upon Hong Kong women. This enables us to comprehend why abused women have been marginalized culturally, socially and politically in Hong Kong, and how AH's sub-culture and ideology is different from that of the dominant society.

In chapter three, I will discuss members' stories of social stigma, and its management, as well as how they get social welfare. Getting social welfare is not regarded as a right in Hong Kong but as dishonorable. Then how can AH members

obtain social welfare and keep self-respect? How do these women strategize AH's ideologies to gain social welfare? Also I will talk about how AH tries to reconstruct members by helping them to acquire different kinds of capital, and how its members utilize the identity created by AH selectively.

In chapter four, my attention shifts to members' stories of their relationships with their family—their ex-husbands and children. Do they still hold onto motherhood and wifehood as an ideal? Why? Why not? What is most important to them now? How do their stories reflect the patriarchal settings in Hong Kong? How do the narratives of different members show their degree of resocialization in AH?

In chapter five, my concern goes to members' stories of social relationships in AH. There have been many conflicts among members; what are they about and why do they take place? How do members view AH? How do their stories reflect the emancipating, as well as the oppressive elements of AH?

After exploring AH members' narratives, in chapter six I will discuss which aspects of AH identity reconstructions seem successful and which seem unsuccessful. What are the implications of this for how abused women's identity should be rebuilt?

Chapter Two

What Is Special About AH? —Understanding AH In The Context Of the Larger Hong Kong Society

To comprehend AH members' identity reconstruction, as simultaneously affected by two different cultures, it is indispensable to understand AH's sub-culture in juxtaposition with the culture of the wider society. In view of this, I will in this chapter pursue three main areas: the cultural expectation and status of Hong Kong women, the cultural image and social position of abused women in Hong Kong, and the ideological milieu of AH. My views will be grounded in relevant literature, local newspapers and publications, and AH members' narratives.

The Cultural Expectation And Status of Hong Kong Women

Hong Kong is said to be a city where "East" meets "West". Some people argue that remnants of traditional Chinese thoughts are oppressive and heavily shape women's social roles, thus their sense of self. However, they may allege that the Western ideology of gender equality has heightened women's status. I will discuss both of these arguments in the following pages. However I will be careful in not creating a stereotype that "West" is better than "East" in terms of gender equality. I am aware of the fact that wife abuse is also widely prevalent in many Western societies and that the stereotype of "West" and "East" maybe misleading. Some Western countries are as oppressive as some Eastern countries in terms of gender inequality; women in some eastern countries, for example China, enjoy greater constitutional protection than women in some western countries.

Traditional Chinese Influence On Women's Self-Identity

People who believe that Hong Kong women's identity has been shaped by the traditional Chinese thought (see Tang 1999a; Tang, Lee, and Cheung 1999; Tang, Wong, and Cheung 2002; Hong Kong YWCA 2003, Cheung, Lai, Au, and Ngai 1997; Pearson and Leung 1995) attribute women's inferior, dependent and submissive positions in family and society to the tenets of Confucianism. Confucianism teaches that a good woman should have the quality of *sàam chúhng sei dāk* 三重四得 ("being three obediences and four virtues") and *yìhn chài lèuhng mòuh* 賢妻良母 ("a virtuous wife and a good mother"); women are supposed to be obedient to their fathers when young, to their husbands when married, and to their sons when widowed (Tang 1999a: 174). These scholars also argue that the prominence of Confucianism legitimatizes patriarchal oppression in Chinese society (Tang 1999a: 174). Old sayings, like "Women under sixty years old should be starved and not given full meals" and "women are like wheelbarrows; if not beaten for three days they cannot be used" (Tang 1999a: 175), normalize the unequal relationships between women and men.

The assumption that women are inferior while men are superior is not severely challenged in Hong Kong. Women are still expected to hold on to the social role of wife and mother, while men are supposed to be the breadwinner and decision maker in the family (Cheung 1997).¹ For instance, the social welfare system in Hong Kong seldom directly attends to women's needs; instead it categorizes women into the unit of "family". The Social Welfare Department stated in 2001 that women play an

¹. Scholars argue that gender inequality is evident in the acceptance of polygamy, which was made illegal in Hong Kong only after 1971 (Cheung, Lai, Au and Ngai 1997; Kowk, Chow, Lee and Wu, 1997).

important role in looking after their families and in performing domestic duties; thus supporting families is equated with supporting women and there is no need to have specific welfare policies concerning women (Association for the Advancement of Feminism 2001). For instance, a married woman cannot apply for social welfare on her own; instead her application for social welfare is assessed on the basis of her whole family (Kwok, Chow, Lee and Ng 1997: 255). Also, public housing is allocated to the unit of “family”, therefore single women are not entitled to public housing (Kwok, Chow, Lee and Ng 1997: 255).

Under the pervasive influences of patriarchal beliefs, living up to the social role of a docile wife and a self-sacrificing mother is enormously important for a woman; otherwise she would be perceived as failing to attain womanhood, something seen as abnormal and shameful (Tang and Tang 2001; Tang, Lee and Cheung 1999; Cheung, De Dios, Karlekar and Vichit-Vadakan: 1999). This is why abused women who leave their husbands are severely stigmatized. However, that does not mean that women will always follow social rules and gender expectation without resistance. As highlighted in my literature review in chapter one, women throughout Hong Kong history have tried to escape from and resist patriarchal oppression.

The Western Concept Of Gender Equality

It is also suggested by some people that Hong Kong is an international city highly influenced by liberal ideas from the West; this should have turned it into a more ideologically liberal city. The concept of gender equality is to a degree well accepted in Hong Kong, as is evident in the enactment of the Sex Discrimination Ordinance in 1995 and the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance in 1997, the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1996, and the establishment of the

Equal Opportunities Commission and the Women's Commission in 1996 and 2001 respectively. All these aim to protect women's institutional rights.

However, some women's concern groups contend that the traditional and patriarchal beliefs in women's social role still persist (Tang and Tang 2001; Tang, Lee and Cheung 1999). The "time use" survey released in August 2003 by the Women's Commission in Hong Kong has raised criticism from various women's groups in Hong Kong. First of all, these women's groups argue that the results of the survey itself are convincing proof of unequal gender relationships because women are still assumed to take up the social role of caregivers. The survey finds that women on average spent 3.3 hours per days, triple that of men, on unpaid activities such as house keeping, voluntary work, and working for relatives and friends. The survey also finds that 84 % of the women were engaged in housework, such as looking after family members, cooking, shopping and so forth, while only 67% of their male counterparts were engaged in these activities. 80 % of the people who take up a heavy load of housework were women (Women's Commission 2003a).

The Women's Commission analyzed as follows:

The majority of homemakers (89%) decide to be homemakers on their own accord, in order to take care of household members (33%), do housework (27%), and/or to take care of newborn babies (12%). Homemakers generally felt other people in their household wanted them to be homemakers because they wanted someone to handle household affairs" (Women's Commission 2003b).

Many women's groups, such as Association for Advancement of Feminism (2003a, 2003b) and legislator Audrey Eu (2003), denounced the unreflecting and conservative attitude of the Women's Commission. The Women's Commission, they

argued, is indifferent to the deep-seated problem of gender inequality and did not criticize the patriarchal indoctrination that “men should cope with external affairs whereas women with household affairs”.

In terms of the huge amount of time that women spent on unpaid labour, the Women’s Commission commented that “The survey results confirmed that women are valuable resources of the community. More women than men are engaged in voluntary work.... Women play a greater role in building social network and social capital within their community” (Women's Commission 2003a). The activists were angry with the Commission, for it circumscribed women’s community participation within the section of voluntary work; it emphasized their role as caregivers and totally overlooked their economical and political participation. The activists suggested that the comment of the Women’s Commission reinforces the patriarchal inequality in society (Association for the Advancement of Feminism. 2003a, 2003b). Some scholars have suggested that gender equality in Hong Kong is simply taken as a concept, and has not been put into practice; women are still defined in terms of traditional roles (Choi, Au, Cheung, Tang and Yip 1993; Hong Kong Women Foundation 1995; Hong Kong Federation of Women’s Centers 2003; Hong Kong YMCA 2003).

Traditional Thoughts Plus The Idea Of Gender Equality

Thus far two major opinions on Hong Kong gender relationships have been mentioned. Some believe that traditional and patriarchal Chinese ideas still govern enormously our gender relationships; others believe that the liberal ideas of gender equality also have a great impact. In fact, these views are not mutually exclusive; indeed both of them shape our gender relationships, and women’s sense of identity.

Undeniably, under the influence of the idea of gender equality, Hong Kong

women's status has been elevated when comparing to decades ago and women are now more aware of their rights. In fact scholars have acknowledged that gender relationships in Hong Kong are better than that in many other Asian countries (see Cheung 1997: 1, Cheung, Lai, Au and Ngai 1997: 204). However at the same time, gender inequality clearly still exists in Hong Kong. As shown by the "time use" survey, the traditional view of women as virtuous mothers and obedient wives is still clung to by many Hong Kong men and often adhered to by women, for they are socialized to take up these roles as their master identity in life (Tang and Tang 2001; Cheung, Lai, Au and Ngai 1997; YMCA 2003). For example, Choi and Lee (1997) have interviewed a female informant who does not allow her husband to do any housework because she sees that it is an intrusion into her domain of power and identity. This is similar to what Goffman says in his books: individuals are socialized to take up social roles that are assigned by society as their selves and they consciously present themselves as such in daily life (Goffman 1973, 1982). It is in these social roles of wife and mother that many Hong Kong women know themselves and these roles are through which they make sense of their lives.

Class Differences Among Hong Kong Women

In discussing women's status, we should pay attention to class differences as reminded by many feminist scholars (see Bell Hooks 2000; Leung 2000; Wong 2000; Tai 2000; Sorisio 1997). In Hong Kong, women from the middle class are usually more aware of gender inequality and have greater resources to resist patriarchal brutality. They are more economically independent of men and can make their own living,² and are more or less imbued with the idea of gender equality, freedom and

² However, the rising level of economic power of women does not necessarily lead to their rising status (see Cheung, Lai, Au and Ngai 1997: 209; Choi and Lee 1997: 186; Leung 1995; Pearson

individuality, and are less bounded by traditional values. However, in contrast to them, most lower class women usually are poorly educated; they are disadvantaged in the labor market, and are economically powerless. Also they are more affected by the traditional Chinese values because they have a lesser chance to be exposed to the idea of gender equality through education. I do not suggest that Hong Kong middle class women do not confront gender inequality; but I want to emphasize the diversity of gender relationships in Hong Kong. Women, as an oppressed group, are not homogenous and have variations and differences among themselves. They may differ by class, ethnicity, educational level or religion. In view of this, understanding class differences is prerequisite for readers to comprehend AH members' identity reconstruction, since most of them come from the lower class. They are substantially different in their outlook and experience from middle class women, as well as from the cultural representations of middle class women in films, TV and advertisements that are predominant in Hong Kong. They are also different from my own life experiences and, I guess, that of my readers.

Lower Class Women In Hong Kong

Analyzing the information provided by the Hong Kong Statistics Department, Ng (2003a) suggests that although women's participation in the labor force has been increasing over the past twenty years, the participation of women who have not had much education and are middle aged remains relatively small. Ng explains that women from 30 to 40 years old, especially those who cannot afford a domestic helper, are usually burdened with child rearing; therefore many of them do not join the labor force. Women from 40 to 50 years old are less busy with child rearing, but encounter

age discrimination when seeking a job, and therefore they tend to be excluded from the labor force.

Since the late 1980's, many Hong Kong manufacturers have moved their factories to Mainland China, where cheap labor is abundant. Therefore, a large group of Hong Kong middle-aged women workers have become redundant in the labor force (Cheung 1997: 6; Pearson 1996: 96). It is now quite difficult for these women workers to get a job because their skills are no longer valued in the labor market and they are poorly educated. Vacancies in the labor market today usually are in the service industry; these women workers are not competitive enough when compared with their younger counterparts. There is this now a group of long-term unemployed middle-aged women in Hong Kong.

Even if the lower class women are lucky enough to have a job, it is probably only a part-time job, which offers less protection and benefits. Statistics show that the number of female part-time workers in Hong Kong has risen from 420,000 in 1995 to 652,000 in 1999. Also, they may suffer from the double burden of doing two jobs—both a paid job, housework, and child-care (Pearson 1996: 99). There is a rising trend that Hong Kong men, especially those who come from the lower class, marry mainland women.³ After Hong Kong men and mainland women get married, the mainland wife can apply for the right of abode in Hong Kong. Therefore after they come to Hong Kong, many female immigrants tend to belong to the lower class.

The Cultural Image And Social Position Of Abused Women

³ It is believed that Hong Kong men who come from the lower class face difficulties in seeking Hong Kong wives. The relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China has become closer after the handover of Hong Kong in 1997, this encourages Hong Kong men from the lower class to have cross-border marriages.

In Hong Kong

How Prevalent Is Wife Abuse In Hong Kong?

Wife abuse has been regarded as a social problem in England since the 19th century (Dutton 1995: 25), but Hong Kong was relatively late in recognizing the problem. According to Tang, Lee and Cheung (1999), there were hardly any official statistics on wife abuse in Hong Kong before 1980. The category of “abused women” was not included in official statistics of any government department prior to 1984 and the first shelter for abused women, Harmony House, was established in 1985. Compared to Western countries, like the US or Germany, the establishment of shelters came very late in Hong Kong. The women’s movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s in these countries has led to the establishment of many shelters and abused women organizations, yet Hong Kong had its first shelter only in 1985. This shows the scanty attention given to the problem of wife abuse in the past. Since then, the number of cases of wife abuse in Hong Kong has soared.⁴ The statistics provided by the Social Welfare Department reveal a three hundreds percent increase between 1998 and 2002; even more surprisingly there is a 15.47 times leap within the past decade, from 1993 to 2002. More information is given in Figure 1. It is argued that these figures are understated, just showing the tip of iceberg. This is because not all abused women are aware of their abusive conditions, and thus do not make any report; adding to that, even if they are aware, they may choose to suffer in silence because of various pressures in society.

⁴ For the past decade, the government and NGOs have put greater effort into public education and in modifying the social security systems for abused women; thus awareness of the problem of wife abuse has been risen, and abused women can get assistance more easily. Increasing reports of wife abuse certainly stem in large part from heightened awareness and a better social security system in society.

Figure 1. The number of cases of wife abuse as recorded by the Social Welfare Department or different shelters from 1993-2002.⁵ (Resources: Law 2003; Community Education and Resource Centre, the Harmony House and Yan Oi Tong Community Center 1998; Chen2000)

Year	No of wife abuse cases reported	Sources
1993	196	Social Welfare Department
1994	215	Social Welfare Department
1995	249	Social Welfare Department
1996	505	Wai On Home for Women, Harmony House, CFSC Christian Family Service Centre Serene Court
1997	507	Wai On Home for Women, Harmony House, CFSC Christian Family Service Centre Serene Court
1998	1009	Social Welfare Depart

⁵ From 2000 to 2002, 171, 189 and 247 cases of husband abuse have been reported. There is also social concern for the increasing number of cases of husband abuse in Hong Kong (see *Sing Pao Daily* 2003; *Varsity* 2003). Some people argue that women might be as violent as men, and men might be oppressed by women. This opposes many previous feminist beliefs. However, some feminist scholars suggest that a wife hurting her husband may often be in response to the abuse done to her by her husband. Hirschmann suggests that the nature of wife abuse and husband abuse is often quite different because wife abuse is an action to gain power and control by the husband while husband abuse may be an action for self-defense by the wife (1995). This is certainly not always true, but is no doubt sometimes true. The relationship between husband abuse and wife abuse clearly deserves further study.

1999	1679	Social Welfare Depart
2000	2150	Social Welfare Depart
2001	2254	Social Welfare Depart
2002	2787	Social Welfare Depart

Wife Abuse And Gender Inequality

Recently, social concern over wife abuse in Hong Kong seems to be increasing; yet as a gender issue, it has never received legitimate attention. Wife abuse is always mentioned by the government or some social service institutions in juxtaposition with child abuse and elderly abuse, or glossed over with the label “domestic violence,” as if they are all similar to each other. Hirschmann (1995) suggests how the name given to the abusive experience that women encounter affects the discussion of the nature of this experience. For example, “domestic violence” blurs the distinction between husband-to-wife violence, wife-to-husband violence, elderly abuse, child abuse and so forth. “Spousal abuse” does not distinguish actions for self-defense from action to gain power and control. “Wife abuse” enables us to focus directly on the power difference between men and women, which victimizes women.

For example, a Chinese new arrival and her two young children were killed by her husband this year, in what is known as the “Tin Shui Wai family tragedy” (Hong Kong people call it *Tin Séui Wàih Lèuhn Sèuhng Cháam Kehk* 天水圍倫常慘劇). This tragedy led to much social attention, but the media and the government have never addressed the problem as rooted in gender inequality; instead they simply regarded it as a family tragedy. A local newspaper, *Ming Pao* and the chairperson of the investigation team in the “Tin Shui Wai family tragedy,” Wan Chi Keung, both attributed the incident to the immigration system and welfare system in Hong Kong. They claim that these systems have attracted an influx of new immigrants from

China and intensified familial conflicts as new arrivals have to face a very different way of life in Hong Kong. (Association for the Advancement of Feminism 2004; Yip 2004; *Mingpao* 2004a).

However, it seems clear, as many scholars have discussed, that wife abuse generally relates specifically to the unequal power relationship between men and women in patriarchal society (see Tang 1999; Macky and Lo 1985; Hoff 1990; Kirkwood 1993; Loseke 1992; Profitt 2000; Sattler 2000; Schechter 1982, cited from Hooks 2000). For instance, Tang writes that “wife abuse is a systematic form of domination and social control of women by men.... Wife abuse is caused and maintained by a patriarchal social structure and its associated beliefs that reinforce women’s subordinate status and sanction men’s use of violence to maintain their control of women” (Tang 1999a: 174). This conception of wife abuse is generally accepted worldwide. For instance, the United Nation General Assembly has adopted the Declaration on Violence Against Women in 1993, which “significantly situates VAW [violence against women] within the discourse on human rights and identifies the gender-based roots of VAW” (Cheung, Dios, Karlekar and Vichit-Vadakan 1999: 3, citing Heyzer 1998). However, in Hong Kong, the sexist roots of wife abuse have not been unambiguously acknowledged. The dominant attitudes of husbands and submissiveness of women in the family as prescribed by patriarchal society leads to forgiveness or even legitimization of wife abuse (Tang, Wong and Cheung 2002).

Misunderstandings And Misconceptions Concerning Wife Abuse

It has been suggested that there is still much misunderstanding about wife abuse in Hong Kong. Such misunderstanding includes beliefs that women are abused because they are unfaithful and immoral to their husbands by having extramarital affairs, are unable to fulfill their duties as wives and mothers, are unable to please

their husbands, or are abused because they are unable to conceive a son (Tang, Wong and Cheung 2002; Gilmartin 1990). All these deviate from the patriarchal expectations placed upon Hong Kong women. Therefore, the larger society usually does not show sympathy to abused women, even though their rights have been infringed. Instead they are subject to devaluation, stigmatization and censure for failing to live up to the social role of women (Tang, Lee and Cheung 1999: 53; Cheung, De Dios, Karlekar and Vichit-Vadakan 1999:9). Some research suggests that the victim-blaming attitude of the general public and some professionals who have contact with abused women (Tang, Wong and Cheung 1999: 974; Macky and Lo 1985: 25) creates obstructions for them to disclose their abusive experiences to outsiders, or even to their friends or relatives. They are afraid of being looked down upon and subject to social discrimination. Ah Ching, an AH member I interviewed, said *“I don’t tell my stories to other people because they’ll look down upon me. I told my daughters not to tell anybody about our situation. I tell them, when neighbors ask where your father is, you should say he works in China”*

Adding to this victim-blaming attitude, traditional Chinese beliefs, as in the saying *gà cháu bāt chēut ngoih chýhn* 家醜不出外傳 (“disreputable home affairs should not be disclosed to outsiders”) also impede abused women from seeking help from friends, relatives or social service organizations; thus they usually have suffered in painful silence for a long time before leaving their husbands. Also, many of them did not consider running away in the first instance because they were perplexed by the traditional myth of family harmony and the belief in *chòhng tàuh dá ga chòhng méih wòh* 床頭打架床尾和 (“couples should forget their quarrels quickly and keep a harmonious relationship”) They want very much to keep their family intact (Macky and Lo 1985 :25); many are worried that a family break up would bring detrimental effects to their children’s upbringing. An AH member, Cindy, told me that *“Although*

I knew very well that I was suffering from wife abuse, I endured it because I wanted to keep my family intact. I have two children and I have to consider them. So, even though my husband beat me, I didn't run away".

However, even if abused women take the step of recourse, outsiders and some professionals, like police, may regard wife abuse as a matter of domestic dispute and private matters, and thus are reluctant to help (Cheung, Dios, Karlekar and Vichit-Vadakan 1999: 9). For instance, research done by the Psychology Department in the Chinese University of Hong Kong from 1998 to 2002 shows that 30% of the police who were interviewed believe that a husband has the right to beat his wife; 28.4% said women sometimes deserve such of a beating (*Ming Pao* 2004b). An AH member, Shirley, who had been beaten by her drunken husband, told me *"People say I should just serve my husband; it's normal for men to drink, his wife should understand and forgive him for what he does when he drinks"*

About AH

History Of AH

In Hong Kong, there are a total of four shelters that provide residence and counseling to abused women and their children. AH was established in 1990, and was initially a group under one of these four shelters, Flower House. AH has four main objectives, which include unifying abused women to fight for better social welfare and public policies for victims of wife abuse; heightening abused women's consciousness about the social causes of abuse and raising their self-confidence through collective action; collaborating with other women's organizations in improving women's status in Hong Kong and advocating gender equality; and arousing public awareness of wife abuse. AH has been very active in criticizing the

government and advocating women's rights. This has made its mother shelter, Flower House, unhappy and consequently AH became independent from the mother shelter in 1997.⁶ Ah Ying said *"Flower House financially supported AH, but AH didn't follow its instructions. Very often what AH did was opposed to Flower House's will, such as actions to fight for policy changes. We found there were lots of constraints imposed by Flower House, so we started to plan for independence; we want to make our own decisions without interference."* I selected AH to be my research site instead of the other four shelters because AH has a more explicit political agenda, ideology and sub-culture, which facilitates analysis on how abused women are resocialized in a cultural environment which is very different from, and to a great extent opposite to, the larger society in Hong Kong.

The Basic Background Of AH

After 6 year of independence, AH now has about 50 members. It is mainly financed by funding agencies, such as the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, and Global Women Foundations. AH is not funded by the government because it is not a social service organization; rather it is a non-governmental organization.

⁶ Flower House has a rule that abused women's residency should not exceed three months; however most of the abused women found themselves unable to face the difficulties in a new life at the end of their residency in Flower House. Thus they set up a group, which was AH, to help themselves by sharing experiences in building up a new life and offering help to each other. As AH developed, its orientation became very different from Flower House. AH focused on modification of institutions and systems that deal with abused women, thus they strongly criticized the government. However, since Flower House received subsidy from the government as AH did not, it dared not directly oppose its subsidizer. It gave pressure to AH and asked AH not to be so politically active. What brought about AH's independence was its protest against a guest in the anniversary ceremony of Flower House, which made the board members of Flower House extremely unhappy because this might destroy Flower House's reputation. Thus, Flower House moved to expel AH.

However, the funding subsidized by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust is monitored by the Social Welfare Department. In other words, the government does have indirect influence on AH's financial resources.

What does AH do?

AH is a non-residential center which has a broad ranged of activities, such as Monthly Members' Meetings, a public housing group, a CSSA⁷ group, a mutual help group, a mother son relationship group, social policy groups, a hotline, demonstrations, talks and seminars and so forth. All these activities are ways through which AH conveys its teachings and reconstructs members into "AH abused women".

AH members: middle aged women coming from the lower class

All AH members are middle-aged and come from the lower class. The abused women who are better off in social position seldom come to AH or other abused women shelters because they have greater economic power and social networks that they can seek help from (see Sev'er 1997: 18)

Most AH members are not well educated and did not have a job before divorce. They are unlikely to get one because of parental responsibilities and having low labor skills (see Ng 2003a: 18). Adding to that, since it is very difficult to obtain divorce maintenance from their ex-husbands, a large proportion of members live on CSSA, social welfare. AH members are among the marginalized and underprivileged groups

⁷ CSSA is the abbreviation of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance. As mentioned in chapter one, footnote number 8, CSSA aims to help people who cannot financially support their families.

in society.

Immigrants and locals

About half of AH members are Chinese new immigrants, who have got the right of abode in Hong Kong, but have resided in Hong Kong for less than 7 years, and half are locals. There are reasonable grounds to infer that new-immigrant wives are more vulnerable to wife abuse; as Mok, Chan and Hung (2003) discuss, they confront many adaptation problems, such as in marriage, job seeking, and language, housing and living environment. Also, the social networks of new immigrants may be weak and very often they are subject to social and institutional discrimination. As a result of all these factors, there is a strong power relationship between the wife and the local Hong Kong husband (see Li Wai Ki 2001⁸), which makes new-immigrant wives more vulnerable to wife abuse. This also fits Campbell's point that women who have personal autonomy, economic independence and a close connection with relatives and women's group are less likely to be abused or at least find it easier to leave the abusers (Campbell 1992: 236,245)

Members coming from China are of course subjected to the cultural influences of their home country at least as much as that of Hong Kong. However, based on literature which compares the gender attitudes of China and Hong Kong people (Pearson 1996: 103), this thesis assumes that Hong Kong and China people share common patriarchal characteristics, even though these may differ in form and expression. Besides, I deliberately select informants who have been in Hong Kong

⁸ Li has studied in her M.phil thesis the cross-border marriages between Hong Kong men and mainland women. She has discussed the power relationship between mainland wives, who usually come from poor rural areas, and Hong Kong men who are usually seen as "incapable" by other people in Hong Kong society.

for at least three years in order to ensure that Hong Kong culture has had significant influence on them.

The Cultural And Ideological Milieu Of AH

Feminist stance

AH's cultural and ideological environment is quite different from the larger society. In the dominant society, wife abuse is seldom regarded as a gender issue as we have seen. In contrast, AH defines it as rooted in gender inequality; AH challenges the cultural expectation of women as "docile wife and caring mother", and the traditional thinking of the importance of keeping an intact family. For example, in one of its press statements AH maintains that⁹:

In today's society, men occupy an economical and ideological superior position. Belief that men are the master of the family is still deeply entrenched; women and children are simply regarded as their possessions.... The prevalent belief in the importance of an intact family covers up the unequal power relationship within the family...

Although AH has a feminist stance, it is not very well formulated and is not as comprehensive as a full feminist theory. As I mentioned before, AH abused women come from the lower class and are not well educated; thus expecting them to fully understand feminist theories and have a clear feminist orientation would be unrealistic. When I say AH has a feminist stance, it means that AH views wife abuse from the perspective of gender inequality, but this certainly does not imply that every

⁹ When AH issues a statement such as this, AH members will first discuss its framework. Then the staff will be responsible for writing down the ideas that AH members have agreed upon.

AH members has a self-sufficient theory of how patriarchal society exercises dominance over women.

Given its feminist stance, AH not only focuses on the rights of abused women, but also pays attention to the general status of women in Hong Kong. For instance, it is an active member of the “Coalition of Equal Opportunities for Women” which strives for women’s rights in Hong Kong; it participated in the female inheritance rights movement in New Territories in 1994; and it has organized the East Asian Women Forum in 2003 together with many other women’s groups in Hong Kong.

Political activism

As previously mentioned, social welfare for abused women in Hong Kong is based not on their basic human rights, but rather is seen as a kind of charity for poor people. Most AH members were not aware of their own rights before joining AH. In an effort to raise members’ consciousness about their political and social rights, AH spends much energy and strength advocating better public policies. It focuses on a wide range of social policies such as public housing, legal institutions, child custody, maintenance payments, CSSA (Comprehensive Social Security Assistance), medical services and so forth. It successfully initiated the “Conditional Tenancy Scheme”¹⁰ in 1991 so that women who are in the process of divorce and in urgent need are eligible to apply for public housing. The Social Welfare Department set up a “Single Parents Supplement” in 1995 in response to AH’s protests; it also succeeded in

¹⁰ People who do not have a special social or health reason have to apply for public housing via the normal queue, which usually takes quite a long time, often many years. However, the “Conditional Tenancy Scheme” allows abused women to line up in a special queue, which will enable them to get public housing in only a few months. However many AH members said social workers in the Social Welfare Department did not tell them about the “Conditional Tenancy Scheme”. They learned about the Scheme only after they joined AH.

pushing the government to set up a one-stop service for abused women, charging ex-husbands interest when they do not pay maintenance payment on time, even though many of AH members' ex-husbands manage to escape from these responsibilities; and it is highly involved in the recent campaign against the government's reduction in CSSA payment in 2003.

Mutual help, self-help and self-governance

AH is a mutual help and self-help center; this makes it fundamentally different from the other shelters in Hong Kong, which are led by social workers and professionals. AH lays stress on self-governance; it practises direct democracy and its highest authority is vested in its Monthly Members' Meetings. The Executive Committee, which is elected every year by all the members, is responsible for daily operation. In order to empower members and to practise "self-governance by members", there is an unwritten practice that at least one of the staff should be an AH member. When I first came to AH, there was a member-turned staff, but she resigned later. Then another member has taken her place. When I was doing fieldwork in AH, there were four staff, among whom one is a member-turned staff, the others were social workers or university graduates. The role of social workers and non-member staff tends to be minimal although unavoidable. It is interesting to see how AH members treat AH's staff. On the one hand, AH emphasizes members' self-governance and participation, thus staff are supposed not to have any leading role. On the other hand, since AH's activities and daily operation requires abilities in writing and in organizing, which are abilities that most AH members do not have, the staff are relied on to a large extent. This paradox will be discussed in greater length in chapter five.

Members take charge of everything about AH, such as holding meetings,

receiving hotline calls, fighting for better public policies and so on. In addition, AH members are highly encouraged to offer help and assistance to each other, such as setting up “caring groups” to visit members who are in need. This kind of reciprocal relationship is evident in how they call each other; AH members address each other as “Sister” (*ji muih* 姊妹), which is a metaphor between AH members and consanguine sisters. It is believed that through mutual help and self-governance, autonomy and independence could be restored to members.

Loseke (1992) suggests that identity reconstruction requires a person to be isolated from others who might reinforce his or her old identity. It needs a new “plausibility structure” to support the identity reconstruction so that people can make sense of themselves and their experiences through this new structure. It also needs an intense identification with persons or groups that represent the new identity (Loseke 1992: 100). Seen in this light, the mutual help and self-help settings in AH not only have an empowering function, they also cluster abused women together, by creating an AH social circle as will be discussed in chapter three, and segregate them from people who might reconfirm their old identity of “obedient wife and mother”. This allows members to rethink their old identity in a new way (Loseke 1992: 111).

Heterogeneous cultures and ideologies

Who is “AH”? Who create AH’s ideology? Is AH’s ideology monolithic? Thus far, I have been discussing AH’s sub-culture and ideology as if they are static, uniform and homogenous. However, as an anthropology student, I am highly cognizant of the dynamic nature of cultures and sub-cultures. The above delineation is just a point of reference for the readers to understand AH and is in no way absolute and definite. When I use the term “AH” in this thesis, I do not mean to imply a homogenous consensus among its members, but, rather its dominant ideology and

sub-culture which exercises great influence on AH members. AH's ideology is created and reproduced by different parties: AH's staff, AH's members, the traditions and sub-cultures of AH. AH members are not cultural dopes who follow cultural rules automatically; many of them have beliefs which are very different from AH's ideology as I have outlined. However, after competition and negotiation among different forces in AH, a prevalent and officially endorsed ideology has risen to the prominence whereas other different beliefs sink to the bottom, yet do not disappear. Therefore, we should not regard AH sub-cultures and ideologies as unchanging and monolithic; instead they are continually in flux. Different members accept, reject or contest the prevalent ideologies in particular ways. Believers in AH eagerly pick up AH ideology; skeptics partially pick up some of its teachings and have doubts over other of its teachings; and non-believers totally reject its teachings.

How Does AH Resocialize Members As “Abused Women” In AH’s Terms?

To see oneself as an “abused woman” is more than having the objective experiences of being abused; it also involves a reconstruction and internalization of identity. To be an “AH abused women” means to reconstruct and internalize identity based on the teachings of AH. I will in the following pages discuss four major ways in which AH resocializes its members as “abused women”.

Entry ceremony: “Do you think you are an abused woman?”

AH staff will first pay a home visit to any abused woman who has already left her husband¹¹ and want to be an AH member. Although AH has its own definitions

¹¹ AH will only accept abused women who have already divorced or left their husband to be its members. The staff explained that this is because visiting any abused woman who is still living with

of abuse women—women who have suffered from physical, psychological and sexual violence, —some of its definitions are quite vague, especially in relation to psychological abuse, which is very difficult to verify. How do the staff judge if a woman is abused or not? A past AH staff, Susan, said that at the end of each home visit they ask the applicant “Do you think you are an abused woman?” She told me “if they say they are abused women, then they are, we tend to believe them rather than being suspicious.”¹² If the applicant passes the preliminary evaluation, she then will be subjected to a mutual observation of three months, after which AH Executive Committee members will decide if she can be admitted. During the mutual observation period, one must at least attend three Monthly Members’ Meetings as a minimum requirement. I observe that AH is not strict in the admission process and applicants usually will be admitted.

The question “Do you think you are an abused woman?” seems to be subjective, but indeed it is AH’s first step to resocialize a woman who has had an abusive experience into an “AH abused woman”—a woman who does not simply recognize the abusive experiences as such, but who also actively defines herself in accordance with such experiences. Susan, my informant, points out that there are usually two types of new members. The first type is women who have lived in shelters for a period; they usually have a basic knowledge of what wife abuse is. The second type

the abuser may cause harm to them. That said, AH is not blind to the need of this group of abused women; it offers advice and counseling to them through its telephone hotline.

¹²AH has set a relatively loose requirement in processing admission. This is very different from Loseke’s (1992) analysis that staff of the abused women’s shelter she studies only admits women who fit into the collective representation of “battered women,” and do not accept women who do not fit that representation. She argues that the staff of this shelter reproduce the image of “battered women” when processing clients for admission, while seems not to be the case for AH.

is women who come to know AH through its hotline. They usually do not know much about wife abuse. Although they may point out the fact that their husbands have battered them, not many of them identify themselves as abused women. Asking “Do you think you are an abused woman?” is the first crucial step in leading new members to identify themselves as “AH abused women” and to think of the violent acts inflicted by their husbands as wife abuse.¹³

Teaching members to acquire social welfare

AH members told me that they encounter tremendous difficulties after leaving their husbands: they have to find a new home and financial support, escape from the further pursuit of their abusers, apply for divorce and child custody, take care of young children who might have witnessed or suffered from the violence, and so forth. AH offers great help to its members when they are in such a distressful and needy situation, which also serves as a way to resocialize them. AH staff and the senior members will teach new members skills to obtain social welfare, and these are put under the framework of abused women’s rights. New members are taught that getting social welfare, such as public housing, legal aid and CSSA, is an abused women’s right, but the government has turned a blind eye to that, and therefore they have to pull together for their own rights. This is a crucial step in reconstructing new members to think of themselves as “abused women” in AH’s term because if getting

¹³ AH in some sense is similar to Alcoholic Anonymous and groups for addicts, such as food, and drugs. In both cases, narratives, group sharing and interaction have been employed frequently. Scholars such as Eastland, Herndon and Barr. (1999), and Wilcox (1998) are interested to know how story telling serves a therapeutic function for alcoholics to accept dependence, reciprocity and higher authority, which are against the dominant cultural values in the larger American society, such as individualism, independence and equality. Similarly, AH has utilized story telling and group interaction to make women who have had an abusive experience see themselves as “abused women”.

social welfare is an abused women's right, then new members have to identify themselves as abused women if they are to obtain social welfare.

Let us take the application for public housing as an example. Ah Mei is a new member who entered AH in 2003. She did not know the "Conditional Tenancy Scheme," which allows people who have undergone trauma, and are in the process of divorce to move into public housing more quickly. After AH staff informed Ah Mei of her rights as an abused woman, she told her social worker that she is an abused woman and has undergone psychological and physical abuse, and thus wants to apply for the "Conditional Tenancy Scheme". Within a month, Ah Mei's application was successfully processed because Ah Mei told her social worker that she would make a complaint if her social worker did not promptly handle her application. Obviously Ah Mei is actively identifying herself as an abused woman when seeking social welfare. In fact, she is a typical example of how AH resocializes members to internalize the identity of "AH abused women" in order to gain access to social welfare.

AH meetings

There are two kinds of meetings in AH. One is the Monthly Members' Meeting, in which the Executive Committee members make report, and important issues are discussed, such as staff's performance, how to oppose the government's reduction in CSSA payments and other policies concerning abused women. The other kind of meeting is that of various focus groups, like mutual help groups, CSSA groups, public housing groups, mother-son relationship groups and so forth. These group meetings serve as an effective platform to further resocialize members into "abused women" in AH's definition.

In many of these meetings, members are encouraged to and sometimes actively impart their own stories of abuse and subsequent life, such as how they left their

abuser, and what kinds of obstacles they encountered after leaving the abuser. It is the arena where their private stories, their worldviews and experiences, become publicly defined. For instance, in a CSSA group meeting, a new member, Ah Yin, talked about her social worker, who has granted her \$4000 housing subsidy per month so that she is able to rent a private flat. Ah Yin was very grateful towards her social worker and other members echoed this. However, a senior member, Ah Hing asked why the social worker had not told Ah Yin about the “Conditional Tenancy Scheme”. Ah Hing said if the social worker is really so kind and good, she should have informed Ah Yin about the Scheme so that she could apply for public housing. The reason that the social worker did not do so is because she did not want Ah Yin to move into public housing, which was worth much more than the \$ 4000 monthly housing subsidy that Ah Yin received. After Ah Hing’s elucidation, all members in the meeting suddenly realized the “trick” and started to blame the social worker.

I do not intend to judge whether what Ah Hing said is true. Instead I want to show from this example how members’ personal experiences and their ways of interpreting the world are reshaped in the public arena of AH.

Language system: we are “sisters”

There are some key terms—“sisters,” “mutual help”, “self help”, “self governance by sisters” (*jí muih jih jyú* 姊妹自主) and “empowerment”—that recur with high frequency in AH. They form a particular language system through which specific ideas, conceptions and ideologies are conveyed. In fact, all these terms represent interwoven concepts. They delineate a picture such that: “We, sisters, who share the common trauma of being abused by men should empower ourselves through self-help, mutual assistance and self-governance by members”. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis postulates that “different languages mark different systems

of perception and the differences between societies' cultural behavior are communicated by and codified in the structure of linguistic meaning" (Moore 1997: 89). Although AH's particular language system is not a full-fledged language, like English or Japanese, it forms a linguistic system which has an enormous impact on reshaping how members narrate their life experiences and perceive the world. For instance, there have been lots of conflicts between some core members and past AH staff. Ah Ching, an AH member, said that their disagreements are rooted in staff's interference in members' self-governance. She said that when one of the staff came to work in AH, she overrode a decision which had been made by AH members a long time ago. I believe the conflict between the past staff and members is far more complicated, as I will discuss in chapter five. My point here is to show that members frame their conflict with the staff through the idea of "self-governance by sisters," which is conveyed and reinforced by AH's particular language system.

In addition, AH's language system also creates a sense of belonging, intimacy and collectivity among AH members. As I observed, not all members have picked up AH's ideologies, but almost every one of them, including the new members, refer to the idea of mutual help. They always say, "We are members; instead of arguing we should love, help and care for each other".

Aside from this, there are additional ways for AH to reconstruct members into "abused women" in AH's image, who more or less interpret the world through AH's cultural lens. These include taking members to lectures and seminars that aim to raise their consciousness, and personal communication between AH members and staff. However, I want to emphasize again that although AH intends to reconstruct members in particular ways, members do not necessarily rebuild themselves into "AH abused women"; some members accept, some contest, and some reject AH's teachings.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed two salient cultures that AH members encounter, the sub-culture of AH and the culture of the larger society. I suggest that both of these cultures have an enormous impact on members' identity reconstruction; we can have a good understanding of AH's ideology only by putting it in juxtaposition with that of the wider society.

Hong Kong women still occupy an inferior status in the larger society and they are still largely expected to stick to motherhood and wifedom as their identities, at least in the lower social class. Therefore abused women, who are seen as failing to live up to Hong Kong social norms, are stigmatized and devalued. Also, there are many misconceptions about wife abuse, and the dominant society has never acknowledged it as rooted in gender inequality. In contrast to the larger society, AH has a feminist stance; it aims to transform members into "abused women" in AH's terms and to empower them by practising mutual help, self-help and self-governance by members. AH conveys its teachings through various means, such as its language system, its different meetings, teaching its members to get social welfare as "abused women", and by asking question like "do you think you are an abused woman", with the assumed answer as "yes".

All these are important background for comprehending AH members' identity reconstruction. In the coming chapters, I will explore how members utilize AH's ideology strategically and selectively to rebuild their identities in the wake of abuse.

Chapter Three

How does AH Resocialize Its Members?

—Three Levels Of Identity Reconstruction In AH

I have explored in the last chapter the cultural and social background against which AH members reconstruct their narrative identities. In this chapter I will first present the narratives of two AH members, Hiu Man and Mandy. Then I will examine, on the basis of their accounts, how the social disgrace attached to abused women affects their daily life and how they cope with that. Finally, I will explore how AH resocializes its members through three levels of identity reconstruction which help them to acquire economic capital, social capital and cultural capital.

Hiu Man's Story

I interviewed Hiu Man in a little room of AH, with which she is familiar. Hiu Man is an immigrant from the mainland who has been in Hong Kong for almost five years; therefore she speaks Cantonese with a strong accent. She has short hair and wears plain clothing. She does not have enough confidence in herself, perhaps because of the abusive experiences she has gone through and her continuing unfamiliarity with Hong Kong.

Her ex-husband came to Hong Kong in the late 1970's and they got married in 1989 while she was still in China. Her children were granted the right of abode in Hong Kong in 1996; since then she always came to Hong Kong with a two-way permit¹ in order to look after her children. This allowed her to stay in Hong Kong

¹ A "Two way permit" allows mainland people to visit Hong Kong for three months, after which they

for about ten months per year. Eventually, in 1999, Hiu Man got the right of abode too. She said she has suffered from physical and sexual abuse starting from when her children resided in Hong Kong. Hiu Man has been an AH member for three years.

Since my focus here is how the social disgrace attached to abused women affects their daily life and how they cope with that, I deliberately select the following parts of Hiu Man's narratives for analysis.

Hong Kong people think mainlanders want to live in Hong Kong and most of them cheat to get CSSA, but it's not true. Actually I had a better life on the mainland than in Hong Kong. Here in Hong Kong, I've got a poor living standard and I don't have money for my kids to go to school. I've got no friends and I dare not greet others because I feel ashamed of taking welfare and being a single mother. But on the mainland, when I didn't have money, I could seek help from my friends and they would help my kids get into a school. My life in Hong Kong is full of pressure and I don't know why I should stay here.

Hong Kong people discriminate against mainlanders. I called the police many times after my ex-husband abused the kids and me, but they didn't attend to my report or refer me to any shelter. One time my kids and I were crying severely in front of a policeman; I told him that my husband didn't let us into the house. But the policeman didn't handle my complaint seriously; he simply knocked on the door for us and left without any follow-up after we got inside.

My ex-husband would force me into sex and hit me whenever he got drunk, which wasn't uncommon. One time, I wanted to call the police but he threatened to choke me to death. The next morning, I packed all my belongings and left him. Then I

have to go back to mainland. A "One way permit", on the other hand, means that its holders can reside in Hong Kong and they do not have to return to mainland.

approached a social worker; I told her I wanted to leave my ex-husband, and then she introduced me to Sky House.² After I entered Sky House, its social worker gave me great pressure. First, she tried to persuade me to forgive my ex-husband and return to him. Second, after I decided not to do that, the social worker ordered me to find a cheap apartment that needed no commission for the agent.³ Without an agent's help, I spent a whole month searching for an apartment myself, but it was unsuccessful. So I returned to my ex-husband in the end because I had no money left. But after my return, my ex-husband requested sex again, but I refused because I was too tired: I was working as a cleaner in a restaurant seven days a week from six in the morning to twelve at night, while he didn't have a job and just sat at home. After I refused, he hit me. This time I successfully called the police and they took me to Flower House.

I stayed in Flower House for three months;⁴ after that I first rented an apartment and then moved into public housing via the "Conditional Tenancy Scheme".⁵ The social worker in the Social Welfare Department was unprofessional;

² Sky House is a pseudonym for a family crisis support center. It provides counseling service and residence to people who think they are in need, regardless of their gender and age. Unlike other shelters for abused women, Sky House's clients are not limited to abused women.

³ In Hong Kong, if people want to rent an apartment, they usually will seek help from an agent. The agent will find an appropriate place for them and they will be charged a commission that usually equals to half of their monthly rent. Since Hiu Man could not seek help from an agent, she had to search for an apartment herself by walking from flat to flat, building to building, and district to district.

⁴ Flower House is a pseudonym for one of the four abused women's shelters in Hong Kong. It and other abused women's shelters have a maximum period of residency, which is usually three months.

⁵ As mentioned in previous chapters, the "Conditional Tenancy Scheme" allows women who are in the course of divorce and in urgent need to apply for public housing.

he gave my name and address without my consent to other people, like my previous landlord.⁶ Shortly after I moved into public housing elsewhere, my ex-husband came to my new home and caused trouble. He hit me and broke the furniture. After that, I had to move into another public housing apartment in order to avoid him. For almost half a year after that incident, I didn't go outside my home, except to go to the market. The AH staff and members guessed the social worker in the Social Welfare Department disclosed my information improperly to my ex-husband because the social worker was the only one who knew my new address. Releasing that information endangered my children's and my safety.

People who work in many governmental departments seem to have received no training at all; they don't understand our situations and have no sympathy for us. They think that we take CSSA (Comprehensive Social Security Assistance) as a luxury and they don't understand our plight; actually we don't want to depend on CSSA. The social workers of the Social Welfare Department scold me from time to time. One time the Social Welfare Department unfairly deducted some of my CSSA money.⁷ I tried to reason with the officer-in-chief, but one of the general officers said I had to make an appointment by letter and he threatened to expel me. Finally

⁶ Hiu Man said her social worker called up her previous landlord to check if she really lived there, and Hiu Man guessed that her social worker disclosed her new address to her previous landlord.

⁷ To avoid her ex-husband, Hiu Man and her children have moved for twice within less than a year. Every time they moved, her children had to attend a new school; thus they needed new textbooks and study materials. However, Hiu Man had no money for that. She has applied for a studying subsidy, yet the Social Welfare Department social worker refused. Therefore her children had to attend school without having any textbooks for more than a semester. After entering AH, the staff taught Hiu Man about her rights and told her how to make complaints to a social worker at a higher level; consequently she received the study grants. However, the Social Welfare Department later deducted this amount from her monthly CSSA payment. This study grant is different from the monthly CSSA money, and the Social Welfare Department inappropriately mixed up the two.

he called a guard to take me away. At that time I was already an AH member; the AH staff encouraged me to keep on reasoning with the Social Welfare Department. Later the AH staff helped me write a complaint letter to the Social Welfare Department; in the end they gave me back the money they deducted. The government isn't transparent enough; the Social Welfare Department deducted my CSSA without any explanation and they always give me huge pressure.

After I moved into public housing, again my ex-husband came and beat me up, and then I called the police. But the policewoman looked down on me and said "new mainland immigrants always cause trouble; women should serve men and it's your obligation to serve your husband. You should be more understanding". This policewoman called me a "daaih luhk pòh" 大陸婆 [which maybe translated as "mainland bitch"] and she said I cheated to get CSSA. The policeman who came with this policewoman said "we'll get no pay if we don't work for a day. You get a living without making any effort, and still you cause trouble." I was crazy at that moment and I didn't know how to explain myself. I was very disappointed with this world and I wanted to die. Policemen should have the responsibility to protect us, but they ended up abusing me. I didn't want to cause trouble; if my ex-husband hadn't beaten me up, I wouldn't have called the police. Since then, I'm afraid to tell anybody about getting CSSA because the policemen discriminate against you, just like everyone else. Now I lower my head when walking on the street because I feel ashamed. I don't dare participate in activities organized by any community center; I'm scared that my identity as single parent, and as a CSSA recipient and a new immigrant will be found out, and I'll be looked down upon.

But I find that it's easier to reveal my single parent status after I've joined AH because it has boosted my confidence. An AH staff told me "if some people discriminate against you because you're a new immigrant, a single parent and taking

CSSA, you should simply ignore them; if some people don't acknowledge you, then don't bother to talk with them." Their advice is right. AH helps me a lot, especially in applying for public housing and CSSA. As an abused woman, I should qualify for CSSA, yet the social workers in the Social Welfare Department create many obstacles, for example they didn't grant any subsidy for my kids' study until I made complaints. AH staff and sisters face these difficulties with me and teach me how to cope with all that. Without their help, I wouldn't know how to confront the staff in the Social Welfare Department. The Hong Kong government gives me money to live, but it can't give me confidence; it's AH that boosts my confidence. AH also teaches me how to speak to people; in the past I didn't know how to speak pleasantly and always upset other people.

Ah Sum [an AH member] said that her social worker from the Social Welfare Department treated her kindly, she's given Ah Sum a furniture subsidy of a few thousand dollars when she first moved into private housing. If her social worker is really so good, why didn't she help her to apply for public housing via the "Conditional Tenancy Scheme", but asked Ah Sum to wait in a longer queue?"

I didn't work after my kids were born. Now I don't know how to make a living because I can't read. I don't understand the society and I don't know how to communicate with other people. Without AH, I wouldn't have any chance to communicate with other people and have social activities.

Let me now leave Hiu Man and proceed to Mandy's story. The social disgrace that Mandy encounters has both similarity to and difference from what Hiu Man faces; this is because Hiu Man is a new immigrant while Mandy was born and grew up in Hong Kong.

Mandy's Story

I interviewed Mandy, who has long hair and dresses fashionably, in AH. She has a strong and optimistic personality. Mandy was locally born and raised; therefore she is more sensitive to social trends and current issues in Hong Kong. Also, her educational level is relatively higher than some AH members, who have only finished primary school; she has completed Form 4 in secondary school.

Mandy came to know her ex-husband when she was 15 years old; they got married after a few years of dating. Mandy said that her ex-husband physically abused her and their children; she decided to leave her ex-husband after ten years of marriage. She entered AH five years ago; she is quite active in AH and has joined the Executive Committee.

Living on CSSA has created great pressure for me, which is even greater than what I felt when I got a divorce. There are many social stereotypes of CSSA recipients; they're seen as deceitful and dishonest. My neighbors in public housing certainly know that I'm a CSSA recipient and a single parent because I always stay at home and don't go to work. My two kids and I keep quiet when we're at home to not attract the neighbors' attention, yet they always stare at us when we're walking in the hallway. One time a man peeked through our door which was half open to let fresh air in. He stood there for quite a long time; he didn't leave until I stared back at him. Aside from this, we single parents are disliked by married women, for they're afraid we'll flirt with their husbands, so I never say hi to them when I first meet them.

Some of my friends, like those I've known for many years, know that I'm divorced and depend on CSSA but I don't tell my casual friend about this.

I tried to apply for public housing before coming to AH, but the social worker in

the Social Welfare Department didn't try to help me. She had paid a home visit to the apartment that my kids and I lived in after I left my ex-husband. But she had no sympathy for us; she said, "Don't you know that some parents live with nine children in a small apartment?" She's saying that I didn't have it so bad—there are people much worse off than I am. I was upset by her comment and said "I've got nothing to say if you think this living environment is acceptable. As for the couple and their nine children in a small room, it's their own fault. They shouldn't have had so many kids if they can't support them. Most of them are new immigrants from the mainland, but I'm different from them. I was born and raised in Hong Kong and I know very well that "léuhng go gau saai sou" 兩個夠晒數⁸ ["two children are enough"]. I planed well about how many kids I should have but I couldn't foresee that I'd have to get divorced. Please don't compare me with those new immigrants.

Shortly after I joined AH, it launched a campaign to fight for abused women's housing rights.⁹ All new sisters wrote a complaint letter to the Social Welfare Department and I also wrote my own. Later my social worker from the Social Welfare Department asked me why I complained, even though she'd been handling my case. She wanted me to withdraw the complaint, but I said no. I told her that it's because

⁸ "léuhng go gau saai sou" 兩個夠晒數 ("Two children are enough") was a famous slogan of the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong in the 1980's and 1990's to educate the public not to have too many children.

⁹ Although the "Conditional Tenancy Scheme" was established in 1991, many AH members told me that it was hardly put into practice and is always being concealed from clients by social workers in the Social Welfare Department. In the year 2000, AH, together with the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, conducted research on the housing problems encountered by abused women. It also held an open forum to discuss the current housing policies, made collective complaints against social workers in the Social Welfare Department, and protested against the scanty attention paid to abused women in public housing policies. After these series of actions, AH members who had made complaints were granted public housing via the Scheme within a short period of time.

she held up my application for a long time. Other AH members' applications needed only three months to process, but mine was still in progress after half a year. When I first applied for public housing, she gave me all kinds of different excuses. She said I still hadn't gone through all the divorce procedures, and wasn't eligible. That's a lie. Also she didn't tell me about the "Conditional Tenancy Scheme". I didn't know about the Scheme till I came to AH.

Giving pressure to social workers in the Social Welfare Department helps because they're scared of complaints, which will ruin their record. I heard from some new sisters that social workers are frightened to handle AH sisters' applications for public housing, and they'll grant them public housing more quickly because they don't want to have any trouble.

In the past, the Social Welfare Department didn't have any leaflets explaining the "Conditional Tenancy Scheme", so I didn't know about the Scheme and was cheated by the social worker. But now I see the leaflets in the Social Welfare Department and we also put them in AH in order to make sure sisters know their rights; this helps sisters to reason with social workers.

Here in AH I know lots of women who are single parents. Other community centers usually organize activities for the whole family, including couples; this stops me from joining them. Also their activities are expensive; for example, it costs thirty dollars per person to join a picnic. In AH, sisters are all single parents and we don't need to hide our identity. What makes me happy about AH is the widening of my acquaintances; I now have friendships with many different people. AH provides a meeting place for sisters; we can chat and share.

AH's emphasis on self-help and mutual help really has had a positive influence on me. It's really happy to be here; we sisters have had many actions to fight for better policies in divorce maintenance, public housing, CSSA and so on. AH really

helps us to build our confidence. We work hard for common goals; we spend lots of time for discussion and actions. This makes solidarity among sisters. I consider these actions as chances for relaxation; staying at home was like being an animal in a zoo, I didn't have many friends and AH widens my acquaintances. Some sisters and I go out together from time to time for entertainment, which makes us very happy. Also, our actions were successful; this really helped to rebuild our confidence. For the past two years, though, sisters have been frustrated by the government's indifference to AH's actions, how can sisters rebuild their confidence in such a condition? Let's say a kid asks for a dollar, but you refuse. And she keeps asking. If you give her once after she's asked ten times, then she'll be very happy. However, if you don't give it to her at all, she'll be very upset. The government is like the latter case. We ask the government ten times and it always refuses. So it's hard to get confidence from AH in the past two years because sisters have come to think our actions will change nothing.

Take CSSA as an example. In 1999 the government decided to cut the CSSA expenditure, but it made concessions after different NGOs protested, and finally didn't cut CSSA for the elderly and disabled, and kept the housing allowances as well. But this time, in 2003, the government proposed to cut CSSA payment by 11.1 percent, and didn't give way even when many people protested. This makes sisters think our effort is useless, and we don't feel like joining any protests. I didn't join this year because it will change nothing. We're single parents; we join these protests at the expense of looking after our children.

Now, the greatest difficulty in my life is how to become independent of CSSA. I'm getting old and it's hard to get a job. Even if I could get one, the money I'd earn is about six thousand dollars a month. How could I support my kids on that? Rent costs more than a thousand dollars, electricity, water and so on costs another

thousand dollars and there's less than four thousand dollars left. I don't know what's wrong with this society. The past was different. In the past, at least I'd find two jobs to earn enough money to make a living, but now it's difficult to find even one job. I told my kids that money isn't everything, but it's impossible to do anything without money

Let us now move on to analyze a main theme in Hiu Man's and Mandy's narratives—social stigma.

Analysis

Social Stigma And Its Management

We can see from Hiu Man's and Mandy's narratives that they are being discriminated against in daily life. Why are they being discriminated against? What do they think about the social stigma they face? How are their lives being affected and how do they manage these stigmas? Let me now analyze three types of social stigma that AH members face, as new immigrants from mainland, as single parents and abused women, and as social welfare recipients.

New immigrants from mainland China

One form of stigma that Hiu Man faces but that does not apply to Mandy is being a new immigrant from the mainland. Hiu Man came to Hong Kong five years ago; she has a heavy mainland accent and her dressing style is not so trendy; therefore it is easy to tell that she is a new immigrant. Being a new immigrant, in this case, is what Goffman (1968) labels as “discredited deviant”, one who cannot easily conceal her deviant stigma from others.

As manifested in Hiu Man's account, she has been mistreated because she is a new immigrant. The policewoman she met called her "daaih luhk pòh 大陸婆" ["mainland bitch"], which is a very derogatory and devalued term in Hong Kong. It shows contempt for mainland people. And the policeman Hiu Man met said, "*we'll get no pay if we don't work for a day. You get a living without making any effort, and still you cause trouble.*" Hiu Man's story reflects one of the major perceptions of mainlanders in the larger Hong Kong society. New immigrants from the Mainland are usually thought to be uneducated, uncivilized, dependent, greedy and inferior; they are highly stigmatized. The Hong Kong Christian Institute (2003) writes that "*The Hong Kong SAR government creates the false impression that new immigrants are highly dependent on social welfare. They are being discriminated against and sometimes bullied and as a result our society has become highly segregated*"

Facing these social stereotypes, how does Hiu Man cope with the identity of being a new immigrant? She performs stigma management in three ways. First, she denies the truth of the accusations that are made to her as a new immigrant. She tries to dismiss the stereotype that mainland immigrants are greedy, long to live in Hong Kong, and are lazy and cheat to get CSSA. As she said, "*Hong Kong people think mainlanders want to live in Hong Kong and most of them cheat to get CSSA, but it's not true. Actually I had a better life on the mainland than in Hong Kong.*"

The second way that Hiu Man manages her stigmatized identity is to make people who accuse her appearing immoral. For instance Hiu Man dismisses the accusations of the policeman and policewoman in her narrative by pointing out that they did not fulfill their responsibilities of protecting citizens, "*Policemen should have the responsibility to protect us, but they ended up abusing me. I didn't want to cause trouble; if my ex-husband hadn't beat me up, I wouldn't have called the police.*"

The third way to manage her stigma is by covering up her stigmatized traits. In order not to expose her new immigrant identity and other stigmatized identities, Hiu Man avoids social activities other than that of AH; she even dares not look at other people on the street. She said, *“Now I lower my head when walking on the street ... I’m scared that... I’ll be looked down upon”* This strategy of covering up a stigma is not only used by Hiu Man; rather, as I observed, it is utilized by many AH members.

Abused women and single mothers

Being an abused woman and a single parent¹⁰ is a social stigma because they are considered to be failing to live up to the social role of wife in Hong Kong society. As was discussed in chapter two, abused women are usually seen as unfaithful and immoral to their husbands, unable to fulfill their duties as a wife and mother, unable to please their husbands, or unable to conceive a son. The Hong Kong Caritas Youth and Community Services and the Lingnan University conducted a survey about Hong Kong people’s view of single parents in 2000. One third of the interviewees believe that single parent family is not a “normal” family. More than 40 percent of interviewees said single parents must have some kind of personality or psychological problems, and they do not know how to raise their children¹¹. Also single parents are stereotyped by some interviewees as being lazy and living on CSSA, and they are considered to be a social burden (see *Apple Daily* 2000, *Sing Pao Daily* 2000, *Sing Tao Daily* 2000).

10 Statistics show that there were 24058, 23059, 30402 and 45072 single mothers in 1986, 1991, 1996 and 2001 respectively. (Hong Kong Council of Social Service 2004)

¹¹ This report does not clearly define if the term “single parents” refers to divorced parents only, or it also includes widowed parents. In Hong Kong society, widowed parents are not stigmatized as much as divorced parents because divorced parents are thought to have personal problems while widowed parents do not.

Both Hiu Man and Mandy have trouble with the stigmatized identities of abused women and single parents. However, in their narratives, they do not specify exactly how they are discriminated against in daily life because of these stigmatized identities; rather they express great fear of being looked down upon. This probably is because being an abused woman and single mother is something that can be easily concealed. Unlike being a new immigrant, who can be recognized within a few seconds by noticing her accent and dressing style, it is difficult to tell who are abused women and single mothers by simply looking at their appearance and talking with them. Therefore, abused women and single parents suffer less prejudice than new immigrants as long as these people can conceal their stigmatized traits successfully. Mandy and Hiu Man have employed three ways to cope with the stigma of being abused women and single parents.

The first strategy employed by Mandy and Hiu Man to manage their stigma of being abused women and single mothers is by hiding this. For instance, Mandy hides her stigma by not joining activities that are organized for the whole family because people will suspect, if she comes alone, that she is a single mother; as she said, *“Other community centers usually organize activities for the whole family, including couples; this stops me from joining them.”* Similarly, Hiu Man avoids greeting and talking with other people in order not to expose her stigmatized identity.

Aside from avoiding contact with people who are non-stigmatized, the second strategy to manage their stigma is by associating with people who share their stigmatized traits. Mandy and Hiu Man come to AH frequently and they have known many members who are also abused women. Mandy said, *“In AH, sisters are all single parents and we don’t need to hide our identity. What makes me happy about AH is the widening of my acquaintances.”* AH performs the function of an “expressive group” (Adler and Adler 2003: 234), wherein members can find

companions, avoid discrimination cast upon them by the non-stigmatized, and seek solutions to their shared problems.

The third way to cope with their stigmatized identity is by openly expressing their identity. This is what Ralph Turner (1972) calls “deviance avowal”, which means that stigmatized people openly admit their stigma and present themselves in a positive sense (cited by Adler and Adler 2003: 234). Hiu Man says it is easier to reveal her single parent status after the AH staff encouraged her and she has greater confidence now. As she said, *“An AH staff told me “if some people discriminate against you because you’re a new immigrant, a single parent and taking CSSA, you should simply ignore them...” Their advice is right.”* Openly admitting ones’ stigmatized identity is not an easy task; it usually requires a new way to perceive the stigma. I will discuss how AH members change their perception of the stigmatized identity in the latter part of this chapter.

Social welfare recipients

The third kind of social disgrace that Mandy and Hiu Man may face is due to being welfare recipients, especially in taking CSSA. As Mandy told us, there are many social stereotypes of CSSA recipients; they’re seen as deceitful and dishonest. Mandy wants very much to earn her own living, as she said, *“the greatest difficulty in my life is how to become independent of CSSA. I’m getting old and it’s hard to get a job.”*

In Hong Kong, social welfare for abused women remains meager (Vagg. 1995: 205,207; Cheung, De Dios, Karlekar, and Vichit-Vadakan 1999 :9) and is based on a welfare model, meaning that giving assistance is not viewed as fulfilling the basic rights of the victims, but as giving charity to them in their plight. The welfare system only copes with those “deserving cases” while “disreputable victims” are not

qualified for help (Vagg 1995: 207). It is for this reason that getting social welfare in Hong Kong, especially CSSA, is labeled as an indication that a person is not hardworking, or is weak and incapable of earning a living. Given this situation, the “legitimate” recipients of social welfare in Hong Kong are seen as including only the elderly or disabled. Others, like the unemployed, families of low income, single parents and new immigrants are seen as lazy, burdensome, incapable, or dishonest.¹² The Hong Kong Social Workers General Union has discussed how CSSA recipients are marginalized: *“in the discussion of cutting the public expenditure of CSSA...the mass media cover stories on people cheating to get CSSA; these extreme and rare cases convey a false message that ‘CSSA makes people lazy’. Therefore the whole society is now hostile and unfriendly towards CSSA recipients.”* (2003: 60)

Given this situation, how do Mandy and Hiu Man manage their stigmatized identity of being social welfare recipient? First, they justify their need for living on social welfare. Mandy explained to her social worker that she cannot support her children not because she planned poorly in giving birth, but because of her divorce, which was unpredictable. Similarly, Hiu Man justifies her reliance on social welfare by emphasizing her plight, as she said, *“Here in Hong Kong, I’ve got a poor living standard and I don’t have money for my kids to go to school.... People who work in many governmental departments... don’t understand our situations and have no sympathy for us.”*

The second way used by Mandy and Hiu Man to manage the disgrace attached

¹² The welfare model, which is seen as doing charity for the “deserving poor”, may have become unable to accommodate the changing needs of Hong Kong society. Since the late 1980’s, many Hong Kong manufacturers have moved their factories to mainland China; this creates structural unemployment in Hong Kong and means that there are increasing numbers of less educated people who cannot find jobs. Also recently the number of single parents has been increasing and many of them have financial difficulties.

to social welfare recipients is by hiding this identity. Similar to the stigmatized identity of abused women and single parents, being a social welfare recipient can be hidden. In order to avoid censure, many AH members seldom tell other about their reliance on social welfare. For instance, Mandy said she does not tell her casual friend about her identity of being a CSSA recipient.

Thus far, I have discussed why AH members are stigmatized and how they manage the stigma. AH members have been encountering double or triple stigmatizations associated with their identity as abused women, social welfare recipients, or mainland new immigrants. However, AH attempts to create a collective identity around one of these stigmatized identities—“abused women”. I am going to investigate this complicated process through Bourdieu’s idea of different forms of capital in the coming section. AH members, after leaving their ex-husbands are short of economic capital, social capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital (see Jenkins 2002: 85). Responding to that, I suggest, AH reshapes members in three different levels: by helping members to retrieve economic capital, helping them build up their social capital on the basis of AH’s network, and offering cultural capital through a specific ideology.

Turning Negative Symbolic Capital Into Power

Bourdieu has discussed four kinds of capital—economic capital, social capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital. Economic capital has the standard understanding, which is money and anything that can generate money. Bourdieu defines social capital as “various kinds of valued relations with significant others”, cultural capital as “primarily legitimate knowledge of one kind or another”, and symbolic capital as “prestige and social honor” (Jenkins 2002: 85). Borrowing Bourdieu’s idea, we may say that AH members do not possess any symbolic capital,

which is prestige and social honors. Instead they have negative symbolic capital because disgrace and stigma are attached to them by the larger society. As discussed in the previous section, AH members usually seek to cover up these stigmatized identities in their daily life. However, interestingly, AH aims to reconstruct them into “AH abused women” who subjectively view themselves as abused women, seeing the stigmatized identities as part of their normal selves which they need not be ashamed of, and narrate their experience from the framework that AH advocates. How does AH make members come out with the identity of “abused women,” which they initially concealed with every effort? How does AH turn members’ negative symbolic capital into a kind of bargaining power and self-identity? I suggest the very first step AH does is to guide members to acquire economic capital which provides an economic incentive for members to view themselves as “abused women” in AH’s mold.

The First Level Of Identity Reconstruction:

Reshaping Members By Helping Them To Retrieve Economic Capital

Most AH members are not well educated, and not only depended on their ex-husbands financially, but also in their daily life. Anne, an AH member told me, *“Now I don’t have a man nearby. If my husband was still here, then I could chat with him. I used to depend on him enormously”*. After their divorces, the lives of AH members changed drastically. AH members lost their major income resource, which was their ex-husband. Most of them did not have savings; they did not have a job before the divorce and are unlikely to be able to get one because of parental responsibilities and lack of skills; therefore they are now lacking economic capital—they have no money. This is illustrated by Hiu Man’s story. After Hiu Man

first left her ex-husband, she returned to him because she had no money for an apartment. As she said, *“I spent a whole month to search for an apartment myself, but it was unsuccessful. So, I returned to my ex-husband in the end because I’ve got no money left.”* Mandy said *“Their activities [those of other community centers] are very expensive; for example, it costs thirty dollars per person to join a picnic”* Thirty dollars seem to be a small amount to many people, but it means a lot to Mandy.

The major way for AH members to regain economic capital is through getting social welfare, especially CSSA. AH has been quite successful in initiating policy changes in the areas of public housing and CSSA for abused women¹³. Its argument for modifying social policies is based on two components. First it focuses intently on the great difficulties and suffering that abused women face. Second, it emphasizes that it is the right of abused women to obtain social welfare. In terms of the first component, Clark has written that sympathy is a social commodity and claiming it requires a person to fit into the cultural conventions, that is the person claiming sympathy must be judged to be in a “dire situation” and “morally worthy” (1987). Also, Gubrium and Holstein have discussed how social service recipients must present themselves in such a way that they are judged as worthy of assistance (2001). Therefore in fighting for better policies, such as modifying the Domestic Violence Ordinance, modifying the procedures of how the policemen should handle wife abuse, and fighting against government’s reductions in CSSA payment, AH members have to fit themselves into the dominant representation of a “deserving victim” in order to solicit support and justify their claims. They have to perform in ways that

¹³ As discussed in chapter two, AH successfully initiated the “Conditional Tenancy Scheme” in 1991 so that women who are in the course of divorce and in an urgent need are eligible for the application of public housing; Besides, the Social Welfare Department set up a “Single Parents Supplement” in 1995 in response to AH’s protest.

indicate they are victims of wife abuse, are emotionally troubled, may suffer from physical or psychological illness, have great difficulties after leaving their abusers, and are incapable of maintaining their lives without assistance; therefore they need CSSA, and in a larger sense, need better policies towards abused women. This position can be clearly seen in many of AH's publications and statements.

In a statement entitled "Domestic violence booms, but the policy of the Social Welfare Department has become worse. All abused women can do is to wait for help" 家庭暴力越趨嚴重，社署政策越收越緊，被虐婦女得個等，AH maintains that:

After leaving an abusive environment, abused women have to give up their jobs and live on CSSA (Comprehensive Social Security Assistance) in order to look after their children. Very often, abused women left the abuser in a sudden and unprepared manner; therefore they usually have no money with them. In view of this, housing allowances, subsidy for furniture, commission for agents and rent prepayment must be provided to abused women for creating their new homes.... However, many AH members cannot obtain these allowances and have to plead in front of the social worker in order to get even a small amount of subsidy. For those who have not been granted any assistance, they are compelled to borrow money from friends, which creates great financial pressure for the abused women. (Angel House 2000)

In another statement, entitled "The abusers have a house to live in but the abused women do not" 打者有其屋，被虐婦女周街仆，AH maintains that:

After leaving their ex-husbands, abused women encounter tremendous difficulties, among which housing is one of the greatest. Sadly, the government

does not help to solve these problems and abused women suffer from huge pressures. We hope the government can pay greater attention to the needs of single mothers and put forward special policies for single mothers. (Angel House 1998)

In order to fit into the cultural convention of sympathy and make themselves be judged worthy of social welfare, AH members have greatly emphasized their victimization. They seem to have a powerful strategy to fight for a better social policy and to gain public attention; however this is not without problems. Goffman suggested that “The performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality” (1973: 17). Similarly I argue that some members not only take up the front of a “victim”; they have also internalized the victimized identity into themselves when they justify their need and fight for better social policies. This constitutes a debilitating aspect of the identity of “AH abused women”, to which I will give more consideration in the last chapter.

In any case, AH is quite successful in helping members to get social welfare. Some members told me that after AH’s collective complaint against the social workers in the Social Welfare Department in 2000, they seem to be more lenient with AH members. When somebody claims to be an AH member, her application for the “Conditional Tenancy Scheme” will be processed more quickly. AH’s success offers an economic incentive for members to claim to be abused, if not necessarily to internally identify themselves as an “abused woman” in the initial stage. AH has made the negative symbolic capital of being an “abused women”, a legitimate reason for getting social welfare. Therefore by claiming herself as an “abused woman”, a member who has suffered from abuse but does not necessarily view herself as an

“abused woman” in AH’s terms will gain access to welfare more easily. The story of Hiu Man shows her identification as an “abused women” in AH’s image when talking about her eligibility for applying for social welfare. She said, *“AH helps me a lot, especially in applying for public housing and CSSA. As an abused woman, I should qualify for CSSA, yet the social workers in the Social Welfare Department create many obstacles. AH staff and sisters face the difficulties with me and teach me how to cope with all that.”* This also shows how helping fellow members to get social welfare creates members’ sense of belonging to AH.

However, even though most AH members claim to be “abused women” in the early stage as a strategy to get social welfare; they may not fully understand or accept all of AH’s teachings. For instance, Mandy shows discrimination against new mainland immigrants, which is not desired by AH; she said, *“As for the couple and their nine children in a small room, it’s their own fault.... Most of them are new immigrants from the mainland, but I’m different from them. I was born and raised in Hong Kong and I know very well that “léuhng go gau saai sou 兩個夠晒數” [“two children are enough”]. ... Please don’t compare me with those new immigrants.”* Mandy’s view is quite different from AH’s view of new immigrants. AH does not see immigrants as inferior and uncivilized. Instead it sees them as equal to local Hong Kong people. For example, before 2004, the permanent citizens of Hong Kong and new immigrants who have resided in Hong Kong for more than a year, but less than seven years were eligible for CSSA. However after 2004, people who are not permanent residents have become ineligible for CSSA. The government put forward such a change because this, it claims, helps dampen poor mainlanders’ incentive to live in Hong Kong and helps decrease welfare expenditures. AH opposes this new policy because it discriminates against new immigrants.

It is not rare that members do not take up AH ideology fully. Instead, they

appropriate its teachings selectively in terms of their own lives and views to make their lives sensible and explainable. Helping members to get economic capital provides an incentive for members to claim themselves as “abused women” in AH’s mold, but it is not enough to make them internalize the identity of “abused women” in accordance with AH’s ideology. How does AH further resocialize members after they have retrieved economic capital?

The Second Level Of Identity Reconstruction:

Building Social Capital Upon AH’s Network

AH’s second level of reconstructing members is to build up members’ social capital upon AH’s network, making members one of the “AH sisters”. The economic incentive of claiming oneself as an “abused woman” may fade once members have gained access to social welfare. If members’ strategic identification as “AH abused women” could not be transformed into subjective identification, members probably would leave. Therefore, retrieval of economic capital cannot be the only basis of members’ identity reconstruction. In the previous sections, we saw that Hiu Man and Mandy distance themselves from the outside world in order to conceal their stigmatized identities. In fact many AH members lack social capital because all of them have had to leave their marriages; many of them distance themselves from their social circle in an attempt to hide their stigmas; and some suffer from a shift of social acquaintances for they are new immigrants. Therefore their social capital—significant relationships with others—is on the decrease. The second level for AH to reconstruct members’ identity is to help them gain social capital on the basis of the AH network and this making members “AH sisters”. At this level, AH is not only a teacher for getting social welfare; it has also become part, perhaps the major part, of members’ social lives.

In Hiu Man's case, since she is a new immigrant, her social network was established on the mainland but not in Hong Kong. She had stored up almost no social capital in Hong Kong, and had known few people that she could seek help from. She told me *"Here in Hong Kong... I've got no friends and I dare not greet others.... But, on the mainland, when I didn't have money, I could seek help from my friends and they'd help my kids get into a school."* Hiu Man has little social network in part because she tries to cover up her stigmatized identity by avoiding social activities, as was discussed previously. Unlike Hiu Man, Mandy does not suffer from the shift of social network due to migration for she is locally born and raised. Her established social network seems to be not affected much by her change of status, but obviously she keeps a distance from new social acquaintances and from occasions that would embarrass her in order to hide her stigmatized identity.

In both Hiu Man's and Mandy's cases, as with most AH members, AH has gained them social capital. AH is where they need not hide their stigmatized identities; it is a platform for finding new friends who share with them similar experience; it is where members exchange different information and know more about society and it has become part of their lives. This is summarized by Mandy: *"In AH, sisters are all single parents and we don't need to hide our identity. We spend lots of time for discussion and actions.... I consider these actions as chances for relaxation; staying at home was like being an animal in a zoo, I didn't have many friends and AH widens my acquaintances. Some sisters and I go out together from time to time for entertainment, which makes us very happy."*

AH has become a center around which many members' social networks are established. This is largely done in the following ways. First, all AH members are abused women and single parents; this makes members feel free at AH from social pressure in association with their stigmatized identity. Second, besides protest and

campaigns against the government, AH also organizes “softer” activities that help to link members together. For instance, members will pay visits to other members who are in need or sick; AH organizes some outings, picnics which are usually free of charge in consideration of members’ financial situation. Whenever members and their children join AH activities and meetings, AH will give them the transportation fees. Third, members spend lots of time talking with one another on the phone, they form a strong network through which they exchange information and share their daily life experiences. In view of this, AH is not simply something external to members; its social network creates a collective identity of “AH sisters” and a sense of belonging among many members¹⁴. Above all, it has become part of members’ lives and this is why this level of identity reconstruction is so powerful. The social network centers on AH and the sense of collectivity is a catalyst for members to view themselves as “AH abused women”, even though they may not pick up AH’s teachings eagerly. For example, Mandy has different views on new immigrants from AH as was discussed previously, yet she shows a great sense of collective identity. This self-identification is less rational than sentimental in nature; members view themselves as “abused women” in AH’s term not because they see how abused women are oppressed and deprived of rights, but because of their attachment to other members of AH.

The Third Level Of Identity Reconstruction: Rendering Cultural Capital Of Particular Kind

AH’s third level of identity reconstruction takes place through imbuing members with cultural capital: knowledge. The third level is quite different from the

¹⁴ I observe that there are about more than twenty members, out of 50 in all, who have fostered a sense of collectivity in AH because of their social network with other AH members.

first and second levels because it aims to make members internalize the identity of “abused women” in AH’s terms. This is almost a simultaneous process with the first and second level of identity reconstruction but it continues after members have obtained social welfare and have widened their social network. AH provides two kinds of cultural capital. One is information about the larger society and the other is the ideology attached to this information.

Many members, especially those who come from the mainland, do not have a good knowledge of Hong Kong society and social policies. As Hiu Man said, “*I didn’t work after my kids were born. Now I don’t know how to make a living because I can’t read. I don’t understand the society*” In the Monthly Members’ Meeting, the Executive Committees and the staff impart to AH members information about abused women, about the latest social issues and about different events organized by other NGOs that are related to abused women. A newsletter is sent to members each month for the same purpose. Many members told me that because of what they have learned in AH, they are now closer to society. But of course members are told about knowledge of abused women, social affair and social policies in Hong Kong from AH’s specific point of view. It is true that members are gaining cultural capital, but they are gaining knowledge that is selected and guided by AH and they are thus trained to pick up the AH cultural lens in a gradual fashion.

For example, in a meeting for new members, a senior member told the new members about the existing housing policy and how they can apply for public housing. This appears to be neutral information, but the way it was presented is to lead members in a particular direction. Some senior members first told the new members that the housing policies in the past did not attend to abused women’s needs and how AH fought for their improvement. They said the existing policy is better than before, but it is still not perfect because the social workers in the Social Welfare

Department tend to conceal it from their clients, and women who do not have any children are ineligible for the “Conditional Tenancy Scheme”. Some of the new members echoed the senior members; they said their social workers did not tell them about the “Conditional Tenancy Scheme” and they criticized these social workers as unprofessional. We thus see that equipping members with cultural capital is a way of reshaping them. First, presenting the selected information to members itself is a kind of resocialization. In AH, members are immersed into one kind of knowledge but not other kinds of knowledge, as directed by AH. Second, specific opinions are attached to the information. By accepting the information, members stand a great chance of accepting the opinions attached. This further reshapes members to pick up AH ideologies.

Providing an economic incentive to members and widening their social network is crucial in AH’s reconstruction of members, but it is not sufficient. AH further resocializes members to think and act from the angle of “abused women” in AH’s terms by imbuing them with a specific cultural capital in which inheres a specific ideology. That said, not all members will be transformed into the identity of “AH abused women”: women who are highly cognizant of their rights and are willing to fight for them. In fact, only some of the members identify themselves as “abused women” in AH’s definitions on the basis of a thorough understanding of abused women’s rights and needs. Others’ identification is largely based on the first and second levels, imbuing economic and social capital.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the three stigmas—of being a new immigrant, an abused woman and single parent, and a welfare recipient—that AH members may

encounter and considered how they cope with them in daily life. AH seeks to reshape members by reversing the negative symbolic capital of one of these stigmatized identities—"abused women"—making it into a tool for gaining attention and advocating rights. I have borrowed Bourdieu's idea of different forms of capital to analyze AH's three levels of reconstruction. These three levels, which are based on economic, social and cultural capital respectively, simultaneously operate in AH to reshape members into "abused women" in AH's mold. The first level is to remake members through helping them to acquire CSSA and economic capital. AH is quite successful in doing so by emphasizing the plight and rights of abused women, who are presented as victims; this provides an economic incentive for members to at least claim, if not truly view themselves, as "abused women" in AH's image. The second level is to make members subjectively identify themselves as "AH abused women" by making AH become part of their lives. This is done by building up their social capital and network on the basis of AH so that a sense of collectivity and belongingness is cultivated among AH members. This facilitates them to identify with AH. The third level is to keep up members' self-identification as "abused women" in AH's terms after the economic incentive has been satisfied by social welfare. This level involves implanting them with a particular cultural capital—a certain kind of knowledge from the perspective of AH, so that members will come to see themselves as "abused women" in AH's definition and will narrate their lives and experiences from that angle.

We have thus seen that AH's reconstruction is multidimensional. The first level of reconstruction centers on economic incentives, the second level on a sentimental attachment to AH and its fellow members, and the third level on a thorough understanding of abused women's plights and rights. AH's ultimate aim is to reshape members to see themselves as "abused women" in AH's image, on the basis of

understanding the plights and rights of abused women, and the social politics of society. However, members do negotiate with AH and may not behave as AH desires. From my observation, AH members stick to these three levels to differing degrees. Some leave AH for their own reasons after their economic incentives have been satisfied by welfare and public housing; some stay in AH because of sentimental attachment to AH and their friends made at AH; and some really see themselves as “abused women” after the third level of resocialization. In the next chapter, I will investigate in greater depth how members negotiate their worldview with AH’s attempted remodelings.

Chapter Four

How Members Accept, Contest Or Reject AH's Ideology?

In the previous chapter I investigated, through two AH members' narratives on social stigma and its management, how AH reconstruct its members' identities on three different levels—helping them to obtain social welfare, expanding their social network, and imbuing into them a specific knowledge about abused women.

However members can resist and transcend these influences to some extent; not all of them accept AH's teachings fully. In this chapter I will show how AH members selectively appropriate AH's teachings to negotiate with the ideology of larger Hong Kong society; I will take the members' narratives on their families—their ex-husbands and children—as an example. However, as highlighted in chapter two, AH members are not well educated, especially those members who came from Mainland China; therefore readers should not expect them to be able to say fluently and systematically how AH's ideology has affected them. Instead, the ideologies of the larger society and of AH have been subtly interwoven into members' stories, in ways of which they may not be fully conscious. Below are stories of Ah Wai and Ah Yee. As the reader can see, they come from different backgrounds and have incorporated AH's teaching to different extents.

Ah Wai's Story

Ah Wai is in her late thirties. She is a new Chinese immigrant who came to Hong Kong with two children three years ago. In 2000, when she was still on the mainland, she lost contact with her Hong Kong husband for half a year; she came to Hong Kong to find out what happened to him. Later she discovered that he had been

sent to a drug addiction treatment center.

Ah Wai told me that she has suffered from physical and sexual abuse at his hands. Ah Wai said that her ex-husband has excessive and unreasonable sexual demands; he might require sex two or three times a day. Her ex-husband was lightly disabled and had been unemployed for a long time; thus he was living on CSSA. However, Ah Wai had two jobs, as cleaners in fast food restaurants, which made her very exhausted. She found it tiring to have sex so frequently.

To illustrate how AH members may selectively appropriate AH's teachings to negotiate with the ideology of larger Hong Kong society, I select Ah Wai's narratives concerning three recurrent themes in her interviews —her family, her ex-husband, and her children.

I didn't want to see my husband when I first came to Hong Kong because I found out that he's a drug addict. There were other reasons why I didn't want to see him. First, he was very unhappy when I gave birth to our second daughter because he'd been longing for a son¹. He was so disappointed that he gambled away all his money, which was saved up to celebrate the birth of our newborn baby. Second he always forced me to have sex with him. Every time I didn't fulfill his sexual need, he'd beat me. In fact, I conceived a son before the birth of our second daughter, but he forced me to have sex which led to the suffocation of the fetus. He blamed this on my carelessness but he's the one who killed the fetus. Third, he's a "daaih nàahm yàhn 大男人" ("male chauvinist"); what he says must be followed. I don't desire an

¹ Traditionally, Chinese people have believed that a son is better than a daughter because the former is seen as continuing the patriarchal family while the latter is thought to belong to the family of her husband after she marries. Many Hong Kong people still prefer to have a son, rather than a daughter. (see Pearson 1996; Cheung, Lai, Au and Ngai 1997: 206)

affluent life and I just want enough to eat for my family and me. The most important thing to a woman is a warm family and a caring husband. But he didn't care for our family and me, and he told me nothing about himself. All these added up together made me unwilling to see him when he was in the drug addiction treatment center.

Although I didn't visit my husband when he was in the drug addiction treatment center, I had no intention of divorcing him at that time, because I was afraid of being accused of abandoning my husband right after I came to Hong Kong.² I simply wanted to give him pressure so that he'd change himself. We lived together after he was released from the drug addiction treatment center. But, he didn't change at all. He didn't find a job; he stole my money for gambling. One evening when we were in the kitchen preparing dinner, he coughed in front of the rice. I begged him not to do that for it would spread viruses. Then he gave me a punch and broke my jaw; he went on beating and kicking me. At last, I left with my daughter and called the police, and then the police referred me to Flower House.

That is how Ah Wai ran away from her ex-husband. We shall see that being forced into sex is one of the underlying problems that Ah Wai encountered in her marriage.

When we were almost married, I still lived in Guangzhou. My husband invited me to visit Beijing and Shanghai, but I refused because I knew lovers like to kiss and

²Hong Kong's living standard is generally better than that in mainland China, especially in the rural area. Some people, including the media and government officials (see *Ming Pao* 2004a) set forth the stereotype that mainland women marry Hong Kong men because of the good living standard and social welfare in Hong Kong. In view of this stereotype of mainland women, Ah Wai is worried about being accused of abandoning her ex-husband after securing her right to live in Hong Kong.

hug each other, and there might be a chance of falling into sex with him. I was afraid of this, because it'd spoil the reputation of my family³. Later, when I still lived in Guangzhou, a day after our registration for marriage, but before the ceremony, he wanted to have sex with me, and I refused; then he slapped my face. At that time, I wondered if I married the wrong person or if I was too conservative and not open enough. I didn't dare to tell my mum and dad, but I've discussed this with my aunty. She said Guangzhou was an open city and I was too conservative. In fact every time I broke up with a boy friend, it's because he wanted sex. I thought I should reflect upon myself, why does a man need a wife? Obviously it's to have sex; as his wife I had the responsibility to fulfill his needs. So, I forgave my husband for slapping me.

Besides, he gambled heavily. Once I heard from my friends that he was cheated at gambling and lost all the money I had saved up for the Lunar New Year. I asked about this, but he said I was nagging him and then he hit me. Later that night, he again forced me into sex, but I wasn't in the mood after arguing. So, I refused, and then he kicked me.

Though Ah Wai has mentioned the problems she had with her ex-husband, she swung back and forth between praising and blaming him; indeed she seems ambivalent.

Although we argued from time to time, he loved me a lot. He treated me really well when he didn't gamble. He'd buy what I like to eat, and help me with the housework, the cooking and washing. And he loved the kids a lot; he never beat or

³ Holding the belief that chaste women should not have sex before marriage, Ah Wai rejected the idea of premarital sex. In Hong Kong, most elderly people reject the idea of premarital sex. However, it seems that it has become more prevalent among youth.

scolded them. I really loved him when he didn't gamble. I was very softhearted; even when he'd done something wrong, I'd be the one who started a conversation first. I should respect him somehow, I felt, because he's my husband. He's a "daaih nàahm yàhn 大男人" (male chauvinist), and it wasn't easy for him to admit his faults. He had unreasonable sexual demands, he didn't tell me about what he was doing in his life, and he said that men who don't smoke and gamble are not men. Nowadays, men are still the masters of their families and society, some of them are "daaih nàahm yàhn 大男人" (male chauvinist) and it's really hard to change them, just like my husband.⁴ But, it's much better than the past. In my mum's generation, you had no way of getting out of the situation even if you were beaten up by your husband. Men in this generation have improved a bit; at least they'll cook and wash.

Would I marry again? No. I'm crazy and have a very bad temper now. I seldom got angry with people in the past, but I do now. I used to be very pleasing and soothing. Men want an obedient and caring wife, but my bad temper makes me not qualified. So I've never thought of a second marriage. In fact, after I ran away, my friend tried to introduce boyfriends to me. I didn't know what to do. So I sought advice from Ah Hing (a senior AH member). She asked if I want to be beaten again while I still feel the pain of my first marriage. She said a man wouldn't share parental responsibilities without reward; if I couldn't fulfill his sexual need, he might rape my daughters, she said. So, I quickly dismissed the idea of having a boyfriend.

I blame myself sometimes I think my husband took the wrong path because I didn't know how to be a good wife, how to be soothing and pleasing to him. If I paid greater attention to him, he might not have taken drugs or been addicted to gambling. But other times, I think he's a grown up. As a man, he should take up his family

⁴ Ah Wai has divorced her ex-husband, but she still calls him "husband" in the interview.

responsibilities; men should be active and women passive. Men should earn money for the family and women should stay home to look after the family. Maybe he felt lots of pressure and I should have talked with him more in an effort to relieve his pressure.

From time to time, I miss him. He has no relatives and must be very lonely. Actually as his wife I had great pressure; I didn't want to break up with him but he forced me to. Whenever there were festivals, I ask my daughters to call him, but he can't be reached recently. Maybe he's angry with me. "Yāt yeh fū chài baak yeh yàn 一夜夫妻百夜恩"; ("when two people have become a couple, they should commit to the relationship"). We were married for ten years and I'm worried that he's very lonely.

Actually I'm angry with him, but also feel lots of pain. It's a mixed feeling. You think I wanted to run away when I was married to him? No, it was like carrying a thousand kilos of metal when I left him. Before, I didn't leave even when he beat me because I thought "chòhng tàuh dá ga chòhng méih wòh 床頭打架床尾和" ("couples should forget their quarrel quickly and keep a harmonious relationship"). I ran away because he took drugs and owed a lot of debt. Also, if my husband always hits me, scolds me and doesn't fulfill his family responsibilities, then I prefer not to have a husband. If my husband begs for a reunion, I wouldn't accept it because I can't forget those unhappy incidents with him. But he's still the father of my daughters, that's why I told my daughters to call him from time to time. They have the right to do that.

To me, my two daughters are of huge importance now, even more important than I am. When they're sick or having trouble, I'm very anxious and nervous. I'm worried I couldn't teach them to be good people. If they become bad, I'll feel guilty towards their father because I failed to give them an intact and complete family by

running away from their father. Sometimes, I think it's a mistake to marry and give birth, because my daughters are tortured by having an incomplete family. It's unfair to them, because everybody has a daddy, but they don't. The elder daughter sometimes signs her father's name in her school handbook; she said she doesn't want to belong to a single parent family.

As a single parent, my life is really difficult. I don't tell others about my family. If they know you're a single parent, they wonder why: is it because you treated your husband badly or because your husband didn't like you because you're too old. Now I don't have a man nearby. If my husband was still here, then I could talk to him. When I lived with my husband, I depended on him enormously. The burden of a normal family with a wife and a husband is less than that of a single parent family, because the couple can share the burden between them. Actually I feel that my family without a husband isn't a real family. When I see people shopping with the whole family, including a husband, I feel regret. Also I feel that I would owe my husband something if I marry another man because I abandoned him. Now the whole world seems to be dark and I have to bear all the responsibilities and pressures.

We see that Ah Wai, a new immigrant from the Mainland, is ambivalent about her ex-husband and her future. She holds onto values of the larger society more than those of AH. Let me now present Ah Yee's story, which is very different from that of Ah Wai; she is locally born and she has firmly adopted AH's teachings as compared to Ah Wai.

Ah Yee's Story

Ah Yee has short hair and wears plain clothing. She was born and raised in

Hong Kong. She seems to have a good understanding of Hong Kong society and is familiar with its social policies.

She started working as an office clerk after graduation from a secondary school; she met her ex-husband in the company, where he was an office clerk. Ah Yee became a full time housewife after getting married; she used to live with her ex-husband and his family—his mothers and brothers, before she left her ex-husband. She has young children.

Ah Yee is a senior AH member, who entered AH before it split from Flower House, and she has been an Executive Committee member for four years. Like Ah Wai, she now depends on CSSA.

My ex-husband didn't hit me, but his mother and family did. They said I was an unlucky person, and they always hit me and scolded me. They said his father died after my ex-husband and I fell in love; his brother-in-law passed away and his younger brother became mentally ill after we married. They attributed all these to the bad luck I brought. They psychologically and physically abused me. At first my ex-mother-in-law just scolded me, but later she hit me whenever she wanted. Seeing all this, my ex-husband didn't stop his mother. I think he's blind with filial piety; no matter what his mother did, he stood on her side. I thought of leaving him after our first daughter was born, but somehow I felt that he might change. But two years later when I gave birth to our second daughter, nothing had changed; I couldn't put up with it any more and I left for Flower House.

He called me after I left and asked me to come home. He promised to talk with his mother. I replied angrily "Are you going to ask your mother not to beat me?" He asked me to stop saying this. Actually he didn't think there were any problems and he just believed what his mother told him. I'm not against filial piety, but he's a grown

up who has the ability to judge what should be done and what shouldn't. He shouldn't fulfill his filial piety at the expense of other people's rights! I don't hate him; instead I find him a pitiful person, for he lost his wife and children because of his filial piety. When he discovers the truth, that his mother did hit me, how will he feel? He definitely will feel great pain. I think it's better for him not to know the truth.

Although we've divorced, he's still the father of the kids and their affiliation can't be denied; I wanted them to keep in touch. But, he never called the kids. Sometimes I'd ask my kids to call him and they've met a few times. But his family wasn't so nice with my kids. So, I decided not to arrange any meetings again, unless he asks for it.

I don't reject contact with men. But shortly after I left my ex-husband, I didn't have many chances to reach outside because I devoted myself to looking after my kids. To be honest, I rejected the idea of a second marriage right after the divorce because I felt it's too quick. As time goes by, my rejection fades; still I don't try to find a partner deliberately. One thing for sure is, I'll marry again only if someone treats my daughters well; otherwise I won't consider a second marriage. Some people have wondered why I didn't leave the two kids to my ex-husband when I divorced. I know how much I'd do for my daughters; I've even prepared not to marry again for the sake of them. But I can't ask my ex-husband to do anything. If he marries again, how could I ensure that his new wife will take good care of my daughters? To me, the most important things are my kids and my family, like my mum, dad, sisters and brothers. Love with a man is simply one of the things that we pursue in life, but certainly it isn't the only one or the most important one.

I don't think a single mother has greater difficulties in bringing up kids. In fact, it doesn't depend on the family status, single or not, but on the qualities of children. Quiet kids are quiet and active kids are active, no matter how many people are there

to raise them. When my kids are naughty, I may get angry. But what I want is not a husband to share the parental responsibilities, but somebody who I could talk to and share my feelings.

It's true that some people discriminate against abused women. A mother of my daughter's friend talked with me from time to time, I told her about my experience of abuse and how abused women could move into public housing more quickly. She said, "If I'd known about this earlier, then I would have pretended to divorce my husband". I was quite upset by her comment. Do you think I want to live as I'm living? If I had a choice, I'd prefer to wait with my husband for ten years for public housing. Since then, these women told her children not to play with my daughter again. I don't mind actually. Many of my friends know that I was abused; some of them saw me on television programs, protesting for the rights of abused women, and still they treat me as their friend.

I don't think that a family without a husband isn't intact and complete. What does "intact" mean? Who could define it? I'd say there are different family patterns which include single parents and double parents. Could you tell me which is a healthy and intact family? A family with a wife and a husband, but full of violence, or a single parent family in which all members live happily?

I think it's impossible to have absolute gender equality; instead we can only reach a fairer state. Men shouldn't be confined to working outside, and women to taking care of their home. In Hong Kong, people still can't do what they like; men and women are still bound by gender stereotypes. In our language, we only have the term "gà tìhng jyú fúh 家庭主婦" (which means "housewife"), but there's no term as "gà tìhng jyú fū 家庭主夫" (which means "househusband"). If a man stays at home to take care of his family, he'll be called "jyuh gà nàahm yàhn 住家男人" (which is translated into "man in the home"). On the contrary, if a woman develops

a good career, people will call her “néuih keuhng yahn 女強人”(which is translated as “superwoman”), which is a bit devalued; why is there no “nàahm keuhng yahn 男強人” (which is translated as “superman”)? I had these beliefs before I entered AH, though not so solid. After coming to AH, my consciousness has been raised; what I saw as normal has become something I see as wrong now.

Analysis

The stories of Ah Wai and Ah Yee are quite different, for the former shows clear traces of the dominant social ideologies whereas the latter incorporates AH's teachings almost entirely. These stories illuminate how these women utilize doctrines of AH and those of the wider society to varying extents to articulate their past, present and future, thus formulating their narrative identities. The stories of Ah Wai and Ah Yee are personal and idiosyncratic; however they share some characteristics with other AH members' stories, for all of them have been immersed in the culture of the larger society and the sub-culture of AH, thus interweaving them into their own stories. To better understand how AH members rebuild their narrative identities amidst a distinct culture and sub-culture, incidents that I observed from fieldwork, other AH members' interviews, and AH documents will be quoted from time to time apart from Ah Wai's and Ah Yee's story.

Gender Relationships

Gender stereotypes as prescribed by the leading gender ideology of larger Hong Kong society are deeply ingrained in Ah Wai's mind. She said, *“Men should be active and women passive. Men should earn money for the family and women should stay at home to look after the family”* This echoes exactly the traditional belief that

men are responsible for the external affairs while women are responsible the domestic household.⁵ Furthermore, Ah Wai considers herself not qualified to be a wife because she has a bad temper and is not pleasing enough, hence is unable to serve a husband or have another relationship. Along with that, she seems to agree with the belief that it is the wife's responsibility to fulfill her husband's sexual needs even though it is against her will. All these demonstrate that the traditional and patriarchal prescriptions of gender roles appear commonsensical and normal to Ah Wai, although she abandoned her role of being a "wife" herself, to her later regret.

That said, Ah Wai neither thoroughly believes in the dominant gender ideologies nor totally submits to her assigned gender role. Indeed she complains about the dictatorial behavior of her ex-husband. She describes him as a *daaih nàahm yàhn* 大男人 (male chauvinist) who has excessive and unreasonable sexual demands, does not talk about his life to her, and believes men must smoke and gamble to be real men. In fact Ah Wai flips back and forth between the teachings of the wider society and those of AH; that is why she fluctuates when talking about her ex-husband. She blames herself sometimes and accuses her ex-husband at other times; confesses her love for him sometimes and exhibits hatred for him at other times. One of the notable examples to illustrate her fluctuation is about sex. At the very beginning of her story, Ah Wai expresses discontent with the sexual requests, as well as brutality of her ex-husband; she said "*he always forced me to have sex with him. Every time I didn't fulfill his sexual need, he'd beat me.*" Yet in the middle of her story, she shows understandings of such acts and even put responsibility for satisfying his needs on her own shoulders. She said, "*I thought I should reflect upon myself, why does a man*

⁵ This is true not only in Hong Kong. Ortner (1974) has explained why women are universally subordinated, argues that the distinction of culture and nature places women in the domestic household and places men in the public sphere almost everywhere.

need a wife? Obviously it's to have sex; as his wife I had the responsibility to fulfill his needs. Therefore I forgave my husband for slapping me." Yet again, later in her account, Ah Wai censures her ex-husband's excessive sexual demands and brutal acts, *"He's a "daaih nàahm yàhn 大男人" (male chauvinist), because... he had unreasonable sexual demands..."* This shows that Ah Wai does not entirely utilize the dominant gender ideology to make sense of her life because some aspects of that ideology fail to match up with her own feeling and experiences. Instead sometimes she actively incorporates AH's ideology. That said, she seems to have interwoven the ideology of the larger society into her stories more than that of AH.

In contrast to Ah Wai, a Yee has substantially adopted AH's ideologies about gender relationships. She questions the gender stereotype that men should work and women should look after the family; she remarks, *"we only have the term "gà tihng jyú fúh 家庭主婦" ("housewife"), but there's no term as "gà tihng jyú fū 家庭主夫" ("househusband")... if a woman develops a good career, people will call her "ne 'uih ke 'uhng ya 'hn 女強人" ("superwoman"), which is a bit devalued; why is there no "na 'ahm keuhng yahn 男強人" ("superman")?"* Ah Yee demonstrates dissatisfaction with the gender ideology of the wider society. What Ah Wai sees as commonsensical and normal in gender relationship becomes unreasonable and oppressive to Ah Yee. She tell me that her beliefs have been consolidated after entering AH; she said, *"what I saw as normal has become something I see as wrong now."* Ah Yee is an example of how AH members firmly pick up its ideology to perceive the world and their daily life experiences.

AH has a strong cultural environment of rebuking unequal gender relationships in Hong Kong. For instance, AH maintains explicitly in a booklet,

Many victims of wife abuse believe they have to bear responsibility for the

abuse because they do not fulfill the obligations of a wife, such as not being understanding and soothing enough or failing to meet their husband's needs. However, no matter what you have done, as human beings, you should be able to enjoy human rights and have respect from others. No one, including your spouse, has any right to abuse you.

Teachings such as this are pervasive in AH's meetings. I remember in a Monthly Members' Meeting, the Executive Committee members put on the agenda the "time use" survey released by the Women's Commission, which was discussed in chapter two. A senior member started reprimanding the Women's Commission for lacking awareness of gender equality on the ground that it always reinforces the caring role of women. Adding to that, a staff said the Women's Commission has planned nothing to follow up the time use survey, and she disparaged the work of the Women's Commission. Following that, the staff labored to stir up discussions among members. Many members began sharing their bitterness as a wife and mother in small groups. One of them spoke out loudly, "Women have no time. After office hours, men can enjoy themselves by relaxing, but women 'enjoy' themselves by going to market for the family".

This kind of discussion serves as a means of resocializing AH members. It solidifies the beliefs of those, like Ah Yee, who recognize gender inequalities, by giving them ideological resources through which they can intellectualize their experiences. However as Ah Wai's narratives reveal, members can choose when to accept AH's teachings and when not to accept them.

Relationship With Ex-husband And Men In General

In accordance with the different degrees to which Ah Wai and Ah Yee hold on to

Hong Kong society's "common sense" towards gender relationships, they have dissimilar attitudes towards their ex-husbands and towards men in general. Ah Wai still calls her ex-husband "husband" as if they were still a couple; this conveys her ambivalence in separating with her ex-husband. She sometimes expresses affection for her ex-husband, but sometimes hatred; sometimes she feels guilty but sometimes is angry with him. She said, *"From time to time, I miss him. He has no relatives and must be very lonely...Actually I'm angry with him, but also feel lots of pain. It's a mixed feeling."* Her ambivalence can be explained in part by her immersion in traditional gender beliefs, such as "Yāt yeh fù chài baak yeh yàn 一夜夫妻百夜恩" (when two people have become a couple, they should commit to the relationship) and "chòhng tàuh dá ga chòhng méih wòh 床頭打架床尾和" (couples should forget their quarrel quickly and keep a harmonious relationship). Ah Wai has utilized these beliefs in her story to describe her feelings towards his ex-husband.

In contrast, Ah Yee adheres to AH ideologies strongly. Ah Yee consciously called her ex-husband "ex-husband" throughout her whole story; this explicitly shows her determination to cease their spousal relationship, not only legally, but also sentimentally. Unlike Ah Wai, she exhibits no hesitation or ambivalence about divorce; when telling me that her ex-husband asked her to come home, she says she determinedly refused. Also when reproaching her ex-husband, Ah Yee gives reason that emphasizes human rights; she said, *"He shouldn't fulfill his filial piety at the expense of other people's rights."* This is in line with AH's teaching, which gives supremacy to the concept of "rights". In fact, AH has an intense cultural environment whereby members are taught not to linger on past relationships or their ex-husbands. I remember in one meeting an AH member talked about how she ran away from her ex-husband while constantly referring to her ex-husband as "my husband". However, a senior member reminded her, "he is not your husband, but your ex-husband, or you

may refer him as ‘the father of my children.’ ” Then the member said it was a slip of tongue and quickly corrected herself. This incident shows how AH members’ stories are interrupted, interwoven and extended by other members or staff in such a way that their meanings are abruptly changed and broadened, and members are prompted to integrate AH’s ideologies into their narratives in this public arena.

AH also influences members’ views of having future relationships with men. In my opinion, Ah Wai actually does not reject having a new boyfriend or another marriage. Although she thinks her weaknesses in character have ill-equipped her to be a wife, what really deters her is advice from other AH members: “*She [an AH member] asked if I want to be beaten again while I still feel the pain of my first marriage. She said a man wouldn’t share parental responsibilities without reward; if I couldn’t fulfill his sexual need, he might rape my daughters, she said. So, I quickly dismissed the idea of having a boyfriend*” When compared with other AH tenets, like insistence on the rights of abused women and gender equality, AH’s teachings on relationships with man are not so explicit; it does not have any rules that openly discourage members to date or have a reunion with their ex-husbands. But somehow this has subtly become part of AH’s cultural ecology. In fact, I heard from a previous AH member that its environment discourages members from having friendly contact with their ex-husbands or having any reunion with them even if a member believes that she has gotten rid of the problems that beset the relationship. However not all members accept AH’s implicit teachings about not having relationships with their ex-husbands or having a second marriage. This previous member said quite a number of AH members have reunited with their ex-husband or have a second marriage, but they dare not disclose this in AH; some of them never come back to AH again because AH fills them with anguish, and even hatred towards their ex-husbands and men in general, she said.

Although Ah does not explicitly say so, the ideological reconstruction of the identities of “AH abused women” seems to demand that members not have any intimate relationship with men. This ideological reconstruction depicts men as a homogenous group that is evil and essentially bad. Ah Ching, a senior member, told me that *“Some sisters who left AH to marry another men, their present suffering may be greater than the previous abuse. Usually they’re sisters who don’t come back to AH once they’ve gotten public housing. They hastily married another man because they have no confidence and believe that a woman should have a partner; that’s why they choose the second husband without thinking twice. They live on CSSA and have public housing; thus they don’t depend on a man. This makes them attractive to bad guys who don’t want to take any responsibilities. Some of our sisters are very silly; the one who has slept at her side for ten years hit her and his own children; what will make another man that she has just met share her parental responsibilities?”*

AH treats all men as the enemy and blames them for wife abuse and gender inequality. It resembles what Hooks calls the separatist ideology, which sees all men as “all-powerful, misogynist, the oppressor and the enemy” while all women are the oppressed victims (Hooks 2000: 83). This constitutes the repelling aspect of the identity of “AH abused women”, which will be explored in chapter six.

Single Parent And The “Normal” Family

As discussed in chapter two, many Hong Kong people have clung tightly to the mainstream belief that having an “intact” and “normal” family is of supreme importance for women. Abused women after divorce are opposite to this cultural expectation and are viewed as failing to fulfill wifedom. For this reason they suffer from stigmatization from others, and some of them may look down upon themselves as well.

Ah Wai is very upset with her single parent status and her thinking reflects to a large extent the dominant social ideology of an “intact” family. First she said, *“If they [other people] know you’re a single parent, they may wonder why: is it because you treated your husband badly or because your husband didn’t like you because you’re too old.”* This reveals that having an “intact” family with a husband is one of the important yardsticks to measure if a woman is “good” or “bad” as seen from a patriarchal point of view. Those “bad” women are sanctioned by stigmatization from people who are taught to believe in such social values as we have discussed last chapter; thus very often abused women like Ah Wai are too frightened to disclose their single parent identity. In fact this sanction system serves as a mechanism to keep women in their “appropriate” place as ordered by the patriarchal society.

Second, Ah Wai said *“Actually I feel that my family without a husband isn’t a real family. When I see people shopping with the whole family, including a husband, I feel regret.”* We see here that her understanding of a “normal and intact family”, like that of Hong Kong people in general, pivots on a female and a male partner together, plus children. This exclusive definition dismisses other possible alternative forms of “family”, such as single-parent family or, gay or lesbian families, that are regarded as “abnormal” and “incomplete”. Some abused women like Ah Wai, who still holds on to the dominant ideologies of the wider society to some extent, feel perturbed to have an “incomplete” family; some may belittle themselves for that reason.

Third, Ah Wai told me *“Sometimes, I think it’s a mistake to marry and give birth, because my daughters are tortured by having an incomplete family. It’s unfair to them, because everybody has a daddy, but they don’t.”* Based on the second point above, it is believed that having a “normal” family with a mother and father is the prerequisite for the healthy upbringing of children; otherwise children’s growth will be affected. For this reason, Ah Wai and many other AH members feel guilty towards

their children, for they have shattered a “normal” and “intact” family by running away from their ex-husband.

Unlike Ah Wai, Ah Yee distrusts the patriarchal ideology and echoes in her words AH’s teachings. She challenges the dominant notion of an “intact and complete family”: *“I don’t think that a family without a husband isn’t intact and complete. What does “intact” mean? Who could define it? I’d say there are different family patterns which include single parents and double parents. Could you tell me which is a healthy and intact family? A family with a wife and a husband, but full of violence, or a single parent family in which all members live happily?”* Also she questions the myth that an “abnormal” family without a father will have detrimental effect on children’s upbringing, *“I don’t think a single mother has greater difficulties in bringing up kids. In fact, it doesn’t depend on the family status, single or not, but on the qualities of children. Quiet kids are quiet and active kids are active, no matter how many people are there to raise them.”*⁶

In AH, viewpoints similar to Ah Yee’s are publicized. In an AH handbook for abused women, it is written that:

Some abused women are worried about having a single-parent family which they think may affect the upbringing of their children or bring about social discrimination. However, doesn’t a family full of violence cause greater harm to children? Divorce is nothing shameful and disgraceful; it is everybody’s legal right.

⁶ Scholars, like Rodger and Pryor, are sympathetic with children from single-parent families. However they point out that children from divorced families may experience long-term distress if there is not enough social support for them (Foundations 2004).

AH's teachings on single parents are in this sense liberating. Members who were trained to believe a "normal and intact family" is of enormous importance and feel ashamed of having a single-parent family could now explain their single parent status through AH's ideology.

Conclusion

Patriarchal thinking governs significantly how women see gender relationships, wifehood, womanhood and family in Hong Kong. Most AH members had trust in gender-specific roles and the idea of a "normal family" before they experienced abuse; the dominant social ideologies indeed formulated a common sense model for them, through which they made sense of their lives and against which they judged themselves. However, after the abuse the common-sense model became incongruous with AH members' actual experiences and their stories could no longer be easily fitted into that ideology. Abused women are "bad" and "abnormal" as seen through such a model, and it fails to account for their lives in any positive sense.

Apart from the common sense model of larger Hong Kong society, AH members are also immersed in the AH model, which is quite different from the dominant gender ideology. AH challenges the unequal gender relationships and gender stereotypes; it questions the prevailing understanding of a "normal" and "intact" family. The AH model seems able to provide a narrative framework which better suits some members' experiences of their lives so that they could rationalize the past, explain the present and organize the future. In this chapter, I have illustrated with Ah Wai's and Ah Yee's story how AH members incorporate actively the Hong Kong common sense model and the AH model into their narratives. These two models are not two discrete points; instead they together form a spectrum. Ah Wai

and Ah Yee are at two different points on the continuum, with the former more inclined to the Hong Kong common sense model and the latter to the AH model. Other members are located at different positions of the spectrum; some may accept AH teachings to a larger extent. Some, like Ah Yee, now articulate the past, present and future of their lives through AH's teachings; others, like Ah Wai, are still substantially influenced by the ideology of the wider Hong Kong society; others like those who have left AH after having another relationship, do not accept AH's teachings on ex-husband and men at all.

Let me, in closing this chapter, direct attention to how these women's narratives unravel our taken-for granted cultural assumptions in society, in this case assumptions which are oppressive. Society lays down many political, social and cultural rules that appear commonsensical and normal, thus we use to pay no attention to them. However many of them are not "natural" at all and very often are roots in social exclusion, oppression and brutality. Ah Wai's and Ah Yee's narratives explicitly demonstrate how abused women are excluded, devalued and marginalized by the dominant political, social and cultural ideologies, such as gender stereotypes. On the other hand, although the AH model offers an emancipating ideology that can shape members' narratives, it is not without problems of its own. For instance, as discussed in chapter three, the identity of "AH abused women" has a debilitating aspect because some members have internalized the victim identity of abused women. Also, in this chapter I show that the identity of "AH abused women" implicitly and subtly discourages reunion with ex-husbands, or having a new relationship; this contributes to the repelling aspect of the identity of "AH's abused women". I will further discuss the debilitating aspect and the repelling aspect of the identity of "AH abused women" in the concluding chapter.

Chapter Five

Social Relationships In AH

In the last two chapters, I have examined AH members' narratives concerning family, gender relationships, and social stigma and its management. Also, I have discussed the three levels of identity reconstruction in AH and how members appropriate its ideologies in different degrees to make sense of their lives. In this chapter I will study the social structure of AH as well as some of its important ideas, such as "self-governance", so that readers will have a deeper understanding of the identity of "abused women" in AH's terms. To enhance readers' comprehension, I will first describe the ideal social structure and ideological milieu of AH; then the narratives of two members will be set forth and analyzed.

The Ideal Social Structure And Ideological Milieu Of AH

A Democratic And Egalitarian Structure

In practising the belief in self-governance, mutual help and self-help, AH has adopted a democratic and egalitarian ideology. According to its constitution, the highest authority of AH is vested in the Anniversary Members Meeting, which is held once a year; in between these meetings, important decisions are made in the Monthly Members' Meetings. AH members¹ elect the Executive Committee every year, which is responsible for leading AH and looking over its daily affairs. The

¹ As was discussed in chapter two, AH members are all abused women. They were subjected to a mutual observation of three months before they were officially accepted by the Executive Committee as members. AH members have the responsibility to attend the Monthly Members Meetings; if they fail to attend the Meetings for three consecutive times without a proper reason, they will be expelled.

Executive Committee, which should consists of at least 8 members, is being supervised by the Monthly Members' Meetings in which members can object to or revise any decisions made by the Executive Committee. The organizational structure of AH is in theory perfectly egalitarian, but what about in reality?

The AH Staff

There are three kinds of staff in AH—social workers, university graduates from disciplines other than social work, and the member-turned staff. Members are assumed to take charge of everything in AH while the staff is supposed to play an executive role and not to take part in any important decision-making. It is clearly written in AH's annual report that "staff are responsible to execute the decisions of the Executive Committee and the Monthly Members' Meeting.... The Executive Committee and the Monthly Members' Meeting are to supervise the staff." However, the reality is quite different from this ideal, and the staff exercise critical influence on AH. Since members are poorly educated and have limited knowledge of the larger society, they depend on the staff quite heavily. For example, they rely on the staff for counseling, applying for social assistance and so forth. What are the consequences of the discrepancy between the reality and ideal in the role of staff? Also, some of the core members and the staff always argue. Why does this happen?

Relationship With Other Abused Women Organizations

In Hong Kong, there are a total of four shelters that provide residence and counseling to abused women. AH was established in 1990 and it was then a focus group under one of these four shelters, Flower House. However, as an AH member told me, Flower House established Family of Happiness (a pseudonym) in replacement of AH because AH's radical acts and disobedience had upset the mother

shelter. As a result, AH has split from Flower House in 1997, as was discussed in chapter two.

Let me briefly discuss the other abused women organizations in Hong Kong, as they are referred frequently by AH members. Family of Happiness is an abused women center which aims to promote public awareness of domestic violence; it is under the supervision of Flower House. Flower House shelter provides residence for abused women and their children for at most three months. After that, Flower House shelter will introduce them to Family of Happiness.

Glee House (a pseudonym) is another organization which is frequently mentioned by AH members. It is a non-residential center for single parents; many AH members have joined it as they are single parent themselves.

AH is quite different from other abused women organizations as mentioned above. The major difference is ideological. AH is politically active, it has a clear ideology and an egalitarian structure while its counterparts are run by social workers or other authorities and they tend to have a neutral political stance. It is the fact that AH is run by abused women themselves, and is so radical in ideology that makes it so interesting to analyze, I have argued.

The Idea Of Mutual Help

As mentioned in chapter two, AH places supreme emphasis on the idea of mutual help. Mutual help is believed to be an effective way to empower members who share the experience of being abused. However in reality members are not always so caring and supportive; instead they argue frequently. Disagreement in AH is usually among the core members who have been in AH for a long period and have a good understanding of AH's cultural rules and organizational regulations. New members, or less involved members, seldom initiate discussion or conflict, but others

will draw them into these disagreements. The major conflict I observed during the fieldwork was between the core members of the Executive Committee and the core members who are not on the Committee. The former accuse the latter of being picky, argumentative and desiring for power, while the latter accuse the former of being selfish and not concerned for the women's movement and the well being of abused women in general; the former interpret the argument as destructive while the latter regard it as an expression of members' self-governance since members have the right to oversee the Executive Committee. Why do members so often argue with each other? What is the implication of these disagreements for the idea of mutual help?

Before I explore the above questions, let us first look at the narratives of two AH members, Sally and Ah Ling. They come from the two groups that always argue; Sally is one of the Executive Committee members while Ah Ling belongs to the group of non-Executive Committee members.

Sally's Story

Sally is about 40 years old; she was born in Guangzhou, in China. Although she came from China, she looks like a local person, for she speaks very clear Cantonese and dresses fashionably.

Sally's ex-husband was born in Hong Kong and they married in Guangzhou in 1987. After eight years of marriage, Sally came to reside in Hong Kong. She told me she divorced her ex-husband after 16 years of marriage because he both psychologically and physically abused her. She told me her ex-husband hit her and scolded her whenever he lost money in gambling; he forbade her to have contact with other men and always accused her of being unfaithful; and she discovered that he had an extra-martial affair in the last few years of their marriage.

Sally entered AH in 1998 and she is quite active. She is a CSSA (Comprehensive Social Security Assistance) recipient, but she also works as a part-time janitor in an office.

To study how AH members see the social structure of AH as well as some of its important ideas such as “self-governance,” I deliberately focus in the following narrative on Sally’s perception of her relationship with AH.

I come to AH to do voluntary service and help other sisters. AH offers great help and consolation to sisters, especially when they’re unhappy and emotionally upset. It’s quite boring when I didn’t have a job; it’s good that I can come to AH and chat with other sisters. But I spend more time in Family of Happiness now because it’s got more activities and its members are less quarrelsome and more easy-going. AH sisters always quarrel; some sisters believe quarrelling is an expression of self-autonomy, but I don’t agree. Quarrelling makes people exhausted. I understand sisters have their own attitude and stance, but they have to consider other sisters’ feelings. They think their decisions and suggestions are right, but they have to consider if others accept them or not.

In Family of Happiness, decisions aren’t collectively made by members, but by the social workers and other authorities. AH is more radical and sisters take charge of everything; they do what they like. But in Family of Happiness you do what the higher hierarchy tells you to do. One of the merits of AH is sisters have decisive power, but this leads to many conflicts and arguments. It’s difficult to tackle a problem because a consensus is absent in AH. Even after three or four discussions, trivial matters remain unsolved. In AH, different people have different opinions; sometimes what I think is right will be opposed by some sisters. Mutual-help and self-help is good, provided that sisters have a consensus.

Some sisters say it's happier to join Family of Happiness than AH because it has greater solidarity than AH. AH members always quarrel. I'm grateful to Family of Happiness and I insist on going there even when I'm very busy.

AH is different from Flower House because it has employed a sister-turned-staff. A sister-turned-staff has an advantage in communicating with sisters while a non-sister staff may have little understanding of abused women. But the latter has the merit that they must listen to our opinions and instructions, while the former may not follow our instructions so strictly.

AH aims to fight for women's rights and for better public policies. Of course I know about these grand ideals, but it's difficult to put them into practice. Sisters quarrel at every Monthly Members' Meeting; this makes us not able to finish the agenda. AH seeks to help sisters and the Monthly Members' Meeting is supposed to convey messages and reports, yet it didn't function for the last two meetings². So what's the use of meetings and of AH? New sisters join AH to learn more, to make friends and to share their heart; but they'll be frightened away by AH's quarrelsome environment.

It's difficult to handle relationships with other sisters. Some sisters are ordinary members, neither an Executive Committee member nor staff, but they insist that other people should follow their opinions; that's unreasonable. AH has more than a hundred members, it will be difficult to handle if everybody is like this.

Some sisters who have greater exposure to organizations in the social movement circle talk like bureaucrats. They repeat what outside people say and come back to lecture us, it's like showing off. They always talk about grand issues and policies,

² In the two Monthly Members' Meetings that Sally refers to, a senior member raised discussion about medical goods donated by some organizations. The discussion was so long that the original agenda could not be covered.

what they say is as huge as a football ground. How can sisters cope with all that? Sisters have suffered a lot and a football ground is too big for them to run on. Besides, these sisters always scold other sisters and don't show any sympathy and understanding. Although I know they want to improve AH, their ways of expression are too subjective and they always try to impose their wills on other sisters.

I joined the CSSA group in Family of Happiness, but not the CSSA group in AH, because it's difficult to have a consensus in AH. In Family of Happiness, other members will echo my opinions quickly and with great enthusiasm. AH can break through its present crisis only if some sisters change themselves; but they're too obstinate and subjective. Even if they know they're wrong, they won't admit it.

Members from Family of Happiness don't like joining AH because they think AH members are too violent in their quarrels. I agree with some sisters that quarrels among sisters are a kind of psychological abuse. Whenever I 'm being scolded and accused falsely in the meetings, I'll be very upset and unhappy for a few days.

As earlier noted, two groups of AH core members always argue with each other. Sally comes from the Executive Committee while the following narrative, that of Ah Ling, is from a member who is not an Executive Committee member.

Ah Ling's Story

Ah Ling was born in Hong Kong; she is about fifty years old, and is very energetic and articulate. She left her ex-husband in the late 1980s after 19 years of marriage. She told me that her ex-husband comes from a violent family, and he has a bad temper; she attributed his abusive acts to this.

Ah Ling is a senior member who joined AH in 1990; she had been a

member-turned-staff in AH for five years and is now working in another NGO. She is not an Executive Committee member. She did not run for it because she wants to let other members get involved in the core work of AH, she told me. She is among the very few members who do not live on CSSA. Ah Ling has a strong personality and a deep sense of mission.

When I first escaped from my ex-husband, I didn't look like a typical abused woman for I wasn't upset at all. Some so-called professionals, such as social workers, alleged that I hadn't suffered from serious abuse and they tried to persuade me to reunite with my ex-husband. This happens frequently. These professionals always impose their will on others and believe their decision is the best; they think reunion with the husband is ideal and they always insist upon their opinions and ignore those of abused women. I work at AH or other NGOs because the professionals and the system itself is so bad.

The past sisters were more capable and enthusiastic while the present Executive Committee is different. I think it's because the present staff isn't capable enough to lead AH. It's the staff's responsibility to let members know what's a proper life for women³. If members understand this, they surely will have the confidence and power to keep on in their new life. Staff should develop sisters' potential, ability and confidence, and encourage them to try. However, the present staff does nothing to raise sisters' consciousness; they aren't a good example for they themselves don't attend seminars that are related to abused women.

³ What Ah Ling said here is contradictory to AH's principle of "self-governance by members", for she has put great emphasis on the role of staff. This contradiction will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

The ultimate realization of self-governance should be in the form of sisters-turned-staff. Staff exercise a huge influence in AH; they're like captains who navigate the ship while sisters are like assistants. If sisters don't take up the role of staff, they can never be the true masters of AH. You see, my opinions aren't respected simply because I'm a sister, not a staff-member.

I don't demand that sisters stay in AH all their lives. I just want them to keep contributing to the women's movement even after they leave AH. However, some sisters are selfish; they've received lots of AH resources to develop themselves but they aren't committed to sharing what they've learned or to put forward change; they're simply concerned with entertainment. Why do I keep coming to AH? It isn't because I want to gain benefit; rather I want to do something for other abused women. Some sisters may think AH doesn't offer any advantage to them apart from public housing through the Conditional Tenancy Scheme, but I think AH does offer more than this; it offers a chance to learn and to explore. AH is a platform for getting information and experiencing self-development.

AH, Glee House and Family of Happiness are quite different. Unlike other NGOs that simply offer counseling to abused women, AH focuses on the whole structure of society; we struggle to change social policies. Family of Happiness just provides social service; Glee House claims to be a self-help and mutual help organization but it isn't; AH is a real self-help and mutual help center for abused women. Self-help and mutual help organizations aim to develop sisters and to let them be the masters. But a typical social service institution doesn't focus on that; they simply organize activities for members and the staff have great power. If AH wasn't a mutual help and self help organization, I surely would be kicked out, since I always argue with the staff. I know I have a bad temper and don't get along well with the staff and some sisters, but the staff could never ask me to leave because AH is

governed by sisters. If the staff find that I have problems, then they'd counsel me. AH practises self-governance by sisters; but when sisters become mature and are bold enough to challenge the staff, they want to kick her out, even though they can't.

Our sisters don't believe in the so-called professionalism of staff, for we've been betrayed by them. I'm disappointed with Grace (a past staff) who seemed to emphasize empowerment of women. She dared not face sisters' challenges; she couldn't put down her so-called professional dignity. When both Grace and I were the AH staff, she didn't take care of me, a sister-turned-staff; she had the responsibility to train me, but she didn't. Also, she used her professionalism to intervene in the self-governance of sisters.

I don't mind criticism. When sisters scold me, I'll be very happy because this means they've got their own critical thinking.

Sisters, instead of the Executive Committee, are of prime importance in AH. I talk a lot in every Monthly Members' Meeting, but the staff doesn't listen to me. They're like typical social workers, and they don't understand AH. They think obeying the Executive Committee is enough and they don't know that sisters' opinions weigh as much as the Executive Committee.⁴

⁴ There is an unwritten practice in AH that the Monthly Members' Meeting can override the decision of the Executive Committee. It might be argued that this practice is different from the mainstream idea of representative democracy; the executive branch of a democratic government is usually to some extent vested with power in relevant decision making, once they are generally elected. However, it is different in AH. In order to practice the idea of "self-governance by members", to involve members in AH's daily affairs and to let them exercise their own autonomy, AH does not practise this mainstream democratic system. The Monthly Members Meeting, which symbolizes the power and autonomy of members, can override the decision of the Executive Committee, which is generally elected by all members.

Analysis

AH greatly emphasizes mutual help among members; however as is shown in Ah Ling's and Sally's stories, there are many disagreements and conflicts about what this actually means. Since I first visited AH two years ago, I have often been told about its arguments among members or arguments among members and staff. During my fieldwork, these disagreements never ceased. Why is it like that? Some people may think these quarrels are simply personal conflicts among a group of middle-aged women, which happens frequently in daily life. Other people may say that these women are so argumentative because they have undergone abuse. Other people may even think that the argumentative and picky personalities of these women are the cause of their abuse. However, upon closer investigation, I argue it is more than that. In the following, I will investigate why there are so many arguments in AH, how different members narrate the quarrels in AH, what are the discrepancies between their views, and why these discrepancies exist.

Relationships Among AH Members

Different pivot points in members' narrative identity

AH tries to reshape its members by the three levels of identity reconstruction—helping members to obtain social welfare and economic capital, expanding their social capital and social network, and imbuing into them specific knowledge about abused women, as was discussed in chapter three. However, different members pick up its ideology to different extents, as was shown in chapter four; members view AH, their lives and the world differently. Some members internalize their identity as “abused women” in AH's terms because they stand by its ideology; others' sense of belonging is built upon AH's social network and they have

little understanding of its ideology; and some members come to AH largely because of the economic capital that it helps them to obtain. Sally and Ah Ling are good examples to show that members argue because their identities pivot on different levels of AH's identity reconstruction.

Sally's identity pivots on the level of social capital; she comes to AH mainly because of her social acquaintances there. As she said, *"It's quite boring when I didn't have a job; it's good that I can come to AH and chat with other sisters."* Sally is not well equipped with the cultural capital that AH tries to imbue and she does not have a thorough understanding of its teachings. Her narrative in this chapter is largely framed from the angle of AH's social relationships and the insufficiency of solidarity among members. She says *"I spend more time in Family of Happiness because it has more activities and its members are less quarrelsome and more easy-going."* She seldom mentions politics and ideology, such as the women's movement, social oppression and so forth, in her story here, and in her daily life as well, as I observed during my time in AH.

Unlike Sally, Ah Ling's identity pivots on the level of cultural capital. Her narrative manifests clearly that she is well aware of AH's ideology; she understands the issue of gender inequality and focuses on the idea of mutual help and self help. She says, *"Unlike other NGOs that simply offer counseling to abused women, AH focuses on the whole structure of society; we struggle to change social policies... AH is a real self-help and mutual help center for abused women. Self-help and mutual help organizations aim to develop sisters and to let them be the masters. But a typical social service institution doesn't focus on that, they simply organize activities for members, and the staff have great power."* In fact Ah Ling has become a strong advocate of AH's teachings.

Sally and Ah Ling have been re-socialized in different ways, and have different

perceptions of AH's teachings. Therefore the framework through which they narrate their arguments in AH and their lives are different and that is one reason why they argue, and do not understand each other. Let me now discuss how their perceptions of some crucial points differ.

Different understandings of "self-governance"

What does "self-governance" mean? Sally thinks of "self-governance" as "they (members) do what they like". She shows a trace of suspicion of the idea of "self-governance", for she thinks it causes the everlasting disputes in AH. She says *"One of the merits of AH is that sisters have decisive power, but this leads to many conflicts and arguments. It's difficult to tackle a problem because a consensus is absent in AH.... Mutual-help and self-help is good, provided that sisters have a consensus."* Sally believes that members of Family of Happiness do not argue because it does not practise self-governance by members. Therefore, she demonstrates lesser inclination towards AH than towards Family of Happiness.

However what Sally sees as quarrels and disagreements Ah Ling regards as an expression of self-governance. She said *"When sisters scold me, I will be very happy because this means they have their own critical thinking."* More than that, as seen from Ah Ling's narrative, what she understands as "self-governance" is more than "they do what they like" as understood by Sally. Ah Ling's comprehension of "self-governance" is grounded on many other values and assumptions, such as the belief that members should be concerned for the women's movement, should not focus on self-interest, and so forth. This leads to a question: does self-governance mean that members can do whatever they like without any ideological or moral restrictions, or does it mean that they have to act within certain premises? This question is a huge and difficult one, which might not have a definite answer, so let

me discuss both sides of the argument.

Political ambitions versus personal enjoyment

Ah Ling surely thinks that members should act within certain ideological and moral premises. Rights of abused women and criticism of dominant social ideology are always the main themes of her narrative. She said, *"I don't demand that sisters stay in AH all their lives. I just want them to keep contributing to the women's movement even after they leave AH Why do I keep coming to AH? It isn't because I want to gain benefit; rather I want to do something for other abused women."* Judging other members with the principles and ideologies that she holds, Ah Ling is angry with members who lack political consciousness and in her narration she categorizes them as "selfish" and only caring for "personal enjoyment"; as she said, *"some sisters are selfish; they've received lots of AH resources to develop themselves but they aren't committed to sharing what they've learned or to putting forward change; they're simply concerned with entertainment."* Ah Ling frames the conflicts in AH with a moral premise; she implies that these women are morally bad. But are they really "selfish"? Or are they simply following AH's ideology in their interpretation of self-governance?

Sally, who is more attached to the social capital and economic capital levels of identity reconstruction in AH, comes to AH to seek companions and engage in voluntary services. She has barely thought of the women's movement or social movements of any kind. As a matter of fact, she finds the politics and theory mentioned by Ah Ling quite impenetrable and she is discontent with the ways that Ah Ling talks. She said, *"Some sisters who have greater exposure to organizations in the social movement circle talk like bureaucrats. They repeat what outside people say and come back to lecture us, it's like showing off. They always talk about grand*

issues and policies, what they say is as huge as a football ground. How can sisters cope with all that...Besides, these sisters always scold other sisters and don't show any sympathy and understanding." She thinks quarrels and mutual reprimands in AH are themselves a kind of abuse. Unlike Ah Ling, Sally does not perceive AH arguments from a moral point of view; instead she sees them as rooted in the deficiency of individual people. She said, "*AH could break through the present crisis only if some sisters change themselves; they're too obstinate and subjective. Even if they know they're wrong, they won't admit it.*"

In chapter four, I discussed a continuum of members' re-socialization, with AH teachings at one end and the dominant society's at another. Some members are more inclined towards AH's ideology while some towards the larger society's; Ah Ling seems to belong to the former group whereas Sally belongs to the latter. It is because of their different degree of re-socialization that members have different perceptions of AH's ideas. For example, Ah Ling picks up AH's ideology firmly and she thinks members' action should be bound by AH's teachings. However, Sally interprets AH's ideology in a different way from Ah Ling does; she thinks self-governance means that members can do whatever they like. I will discuss these two kinds of belief in greater depth in the concluding chapter.

Relationship Between AH Members And Staff

Aside from the disputes between Sally and Ah Ling, there are also numerous disagreements among some of the AH members and the staff that shall be discussed here. I myself have witnessed three generations of staff over one and a half years, all of whom have been criticized by some of the members. Most of these staff left AH because of their arguments with some of the AH members. It is clear that these arguments are no coincidence but have underlying structural causes.

Insiders versus outsiders

AH focuses strongly on the idea of “sisterhood” and the identity of “AH abused women”, thus a strong sense of peer group has been fostered among members even though they argue among themselves frequently. However, AH has at the same time developed an intense sense of repulsion towards those who are not abused women or AH members. AH staff is one of the groups that are being repelled. Sally said “*A sister-turned-staff has an advantage in communicating with sisters while a non-sister staff may have little understanding of abused women.*” Such a comment is prevalent in AH, and this shows members as insiders, marked off from staff who are outsiders. This kind of subtle division is not so apparent in routine daily affairs of AH, but will turn into conspicuous repulsion once there are conflicts between the AH staff and AH members.

Grace was a past staff who had huge conflicts with Ah Ling. In her narration of these conflicts, Ah Ling draws largely upon the division of insiders and outsiders and she puts staff into an opposite position to that of members. She said “*AH practises self-governance by sisters; but when sisters become mature and are bold enough to challenge the staff, they want to kick her out, even though they can't.... I'm disappointed with Grace (a past staff).... She dared not face sisters' challenges; she couldn't put down her so-called professional dignity. Also, she used her professionalism to intervene in the self-governance of sisters.*”

In Ah Ling's narration, there are two key elements that mark off the staff from the members. First, she assumes that AH abused women, or using AH's term, “sisters”, are insiders who have the common experience of being abused; this commonality unites their thinking, feelings and behavior in a way that non-abused women, such as the staff cannot fully share. Second, the staff, especially the

professional social workers, are to a certain extent seen as the enemy of abused women according to Ah Ling, because they impose their professional knowledge on abused women, disregarding their feelings and forcing abused women to act according to their wills. Staff are implicitly portrayed by Ah Ling as evil, offensive and competing for power. Emphasizing the identity of “AH abused women” and “sisterhood” creates solidarity among members and encourages them to join the women’s movement, yet it ends up repelling non-abused women. This constitutes the repelling aspect of the identity of “AH abused women”, which will be further explored in chapter six.

Blurred Role of the Staff

AH emphasizes the self-governance of members, and the role of staff is deliberately depicted as minimal and unimportant. Sometimes they are said to be like executive officers who put members’ decisions into practice and are being supervised by members. However, in reality the situation is quite different. All AH non member-staff are either professional social workers or university graduates, while AH members have not had much education and some barely know about the situation of society today. Therefore in reality members rely on the staff heavily. For example, it is the staff who pay home visits to any potential members; they assess and report to the Executive Committee if an applicant is qualified to be an AH member, and then the Executive Committee will make the final, yet largely symbolic decision on the basis of their report. The staff exercises great influence over members. This creates a paradox in AH; institutionally, members are supposed to be the master, but in reality the staff are very influential and they do not simply perform what they are instructed. What Ah Ling said is true: *“they (the staff) are like captains who navigate the ship while sisters are like assistants”*. In some sense, staff are the one who steer, yet this

has to remain tacit and unsaid. I suggest that many disputes between staff and members are related to this paradox.

Ah Ling on the one hand insists greatly on self-governance by members and she emphasizes that staff should follow the instructions of members; she said *"I talk a lot in every Monthly Members' Meeting, but the staff doesn't listen to me. They're like typical social workers.... They don't know that sisters' opinions weigh as much as the Executive Committee."* Yet on the other hand she has great demands on the staff, which paradoxically puts them into a more privileged position over members. She says, *"It's the staff's responsibility to let members know what's a proper life for women. ...Staff should develop sisters' potential, ability and confidence, and encourage them to try. However, the present staff does nothing to raise sisters' consciousness..."* Obviously Ah Ling thinks members are powerless and weak and they need staff's guidance, but at the same time she insists that the staff must follow her instructions. The staff are demanded to perform duties that exceed their own constitutional rights, such as to lead members, but at the same time, they must be skillful enough not to be accused of disrespecting the spirit of "self-governance by members". However, the line drawn between these two principles, that is when the staff should lead members and when they should not, is never explicitly set forth, and may shift from case to case. Therefore the staff are sometimes accused of interfering in self-governance of members, and sometimes of not sufficiently leading and guiding members. This makes their position difficult.

In fact, some members have utilized this ambiguity to gain control and dominance over the staff. There are frequent disagreements between some of the core members and the staff. The pattern of disagreement is this: the core members from the Executive Committee usually stand by the staff as they have greater chance of cooperation and interaction, and thus have developed a more intimate relationship.

However the core members who are not on the Executive Committee usually have great arguments with the staff and the Executive Committee.⁵ When the staff is doing what the non-Executive Committee members desire, they are allowed to lead and guide members without being accused of interfering in members' self governance. However, when the staff practise AH's constitution, doing what the Executive Committee order them to do and do not follow the non-Executive Committee members' will, the staff will be marginalized on the ground that they are not "sisters", and do not share similar experience and feelings. Also, they are accused of being "professional" social workers who do not respect members' will and do not uphold AH's values.

For examples, when I was doing fieldwork, Ah Ling was not on the Executive Committee and the staff did not listen to her opinions sometimes. She tried to get the staff to talk to her, but they paid little attention to her and that is why in her narrative she said, *"Sisters, instead of the Executive Committee, are of prime importance in AH. I talk a lot in every Monthly Members' Meeting, but the staff doesn't listen to me. They're like typical social workers, and they don't understand AH. They think obeying the Executive Committee is enough and they don't know that sisters' opinions weigh as much as the Executive Committee."* What Ah Ling criticizes the staff for may or may not be true, but clearly she seeks to gain rhetorical advantage over the staff by depicting them as outsiders and detestable professionals who don't understand AH.

The ways that members gain control and dominance over the staff constitute what I call the "repelling" aspect of the identity of "AH abused women"; this will be further examined in the concluding chapter.

⁵ The core members who are not on the Executive Committee usually did not run for it because they do not want to take up so much responsibility.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that there is a structural cause to the frequent arguments in AH. Members have been re-socialized to different degrees; they perceive AH's teachings, the world and their own lives differently. Therefore they argue a lot and repel those who have different opinions from their own. Members' major disagreements are about the concept of "self-governance" and AH's objectives. Some members believe that "self-governance" means "members doing what they like" while others insist that "self-governance" must be built upon AH's teachings and ideology. Some members think AH and its members must devote themselves for the well being of abused women and women in general while others come to AH because of the social and economic capital that it helps them to obtain, and they do not have or want a deep understanding of AH's teachings.

In addition to this, the conflicting relationship among the staff and AH members has been discussed. AH staff are thought of as outsiders for they are not "sisters", and are sometimes accused of being "professional". The role of staff is not clear; constitutionally they are supposed to follow members' instructions, yet in some circumstances they are expected to lead members. Some core members have made use of this ambiguity to gain control and dominance over the staff.

Thus far I have highlighted how AH's ideology enables members to articulate their lives in a positive sense. Also I have discussed the debilitating aspect of the identity of "AH abused women" with illustration of members' narratives on social policies in chapter three; and I have shown how AH members repels men in chapter four and how they repel the staff and even some members in this chapter. In the concluding chapter, I will further explore the positive and negative aspect of the identity of "AH abused women" so that we can obtain a deeper understanding of this.

Chapter Six

Is AH's Identity Reconstruction Successful?

In previous chapters, I have mainly talked about how members utilize AH ideological resources to rebuild their narrative identities. Also I have discussed the repelling and debilitating aspects of the narrative identity of “abused women” in AH's terms, as well as the positive and liberating aspects of this identity. I will discuss in this chapter which aspects of AH's identity reconstruction are successful and which are unsuccessful, and what this reconstruction can teach people who are concerned with abused women. Before I proceed to these, I will first summarize the background information of AH in terms of narrative, the central theoretical framework of this thesis.

Narratives, Self-Identity And Cultural Construction

Narrative And Self-Identity

Giddens writes that:

The ‘identity’ of the self, in contrast to the self as a generic phenomenon, presumes reflexive awareness. It is what the individual is conscious ‘of’ in the term ‘self-consciousness’. Self-identity, in other words, is not something that is just given, as a result of the continuities of the individual’s action-system, but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual” (1991: 52).

Paralleling Giddens’ words, narratives, or storytelling is how our identity and

self-understanding is formulated reflexively and creatively. Throughout this thesis, I have tried to explore how AH members reflexively recreate their identities through their narratives in interviews, and in their daily lives. Narrative is more than a depiction of facts or recalling of an incident; it creates meanings for ourselves out of messy lived experience. It is not simply the explanations of ourselves to ourselves and others, but also is “intrinsic to the ways we construct identities and manage particular, idiosyncratic aspects of our lives” (Dean 1998: 24). Rosewald and Ochberg call this the “formative power” of narratives (1992:1). In this thesis, I have tried to discuss how this “formative power” of narratives enables AH members to make sense of their messy lived experience and rebuild their self-understanding.

I have shown in chapter two that husbands and families are still seen as of prime importance to Hong Kong women, and they are socialized to believe that the role of wife and mother is all-important. However, being abused at the hands of their spouses smashes all the ideals that used to be held by abused women. This may have a striking impact on their taken-for-granted perception of, as well as action in, the world, because most of them cannot easily explain their lives with the dominant values they used to hold. Rosewald and Ochberg remind us that we all live in a particular political-cultural milieu in which a specific narrative framework is provided. The “frame of intelligibility” of each culture sometimes constrains how narratives should be constructed (1992: 1), thus creating oppression for individuals who cannot fit into the dominant narrative framework. Obviously, most AH members cannot easily fit their lived experience into the dominant narrative framework for women in Hong Kong. This is why they rebuild their own narrative framework in part with AH’s teachings. But again, how exactly do they do this?

Narratives Resources: AH’s VS The larger society’s

Johnson and Ferraro suggest that abused women initially have different ways to rationalize the abuse inflicted upon them, such as denying that the abuser is performing violent acts, and trivializing the injury that is done to them. However, a “new feeling of being exploited” (1984) in abused women will occur under certain circumstances, and this will instigate their reflections on the taken-for-granted values in ones’ life. Abused women’s shelters, Johnson and Ferraro say, facilitate the occurrence of a “feeling of being exploited” in abused women because they help abused women to drive off the feelings of guilt and inadequacy by creating an environment which is conducive to the redefinitions of abuse, and they provide a change in resources that allows abused women to overcome obstacles when leaving the abusers and starting a new life.

Seen in this light, AH is a key in the development of a “feeling of being exploited” in members, which in turns promotes the formation of a new narrative identity because, as Johnson and Ferraro suggest, AH renders an external definition of the abuse and provides both the ideological and material resources for members to make new retrospective interpretations. In chapters three, four and five, I have explored how AH members rebuild their worldview and narrative identities with AH’s ideological resources after their old identity has become inadequate. However, we cannot forget the impact of the culture of the larger society on members’ identity reconstruction. Personal reflexivity and creativity is the main focus in the study of narrative identity, yet narration is never a totally personal or an isolated process. It is also culturally circumscribed, for we tell stories by utilizing the local culture: “circumstantial availability and use of particular interpretive resources” shape the stories we tell. (Gubrium 1989, 1991; Gubrium and Holstein 1995, 1997, 2000, 2001. See also Dean 1998; Gidden 1992; Freeman 1993; Lawless 2001; Rosewald and Ochberg 1992 , Mattingly and Garro 2000; Linde 1993). Local culture, in which

people live, provides interpretive resources that they can utilize to make sense of their lives, and formulate narratives out of lived experience. I have argued that AH members encounter and are influenced by two salient cultures in their lives—the local culture of Hong Kong society and the sub-culture of AH—which differ immensely or even contradict each other in crucial respects.

Traditional and patriarchal beliefs persist in larger Hong Kong society and women still suffer from gender stereotypes that resocialize them to take up the role of mother and wife. Since abused women are viewed as failing to live up to these social roles, they are stigmatized. There are many misconceptions about wife abuse in society, and its roots in gender inequality are seldom addressed, except by some women's organizations. In contrast to that, AH unambiguously defines wife abuse as rooted in gender inequality. It aims to improve the well being of abused women and women in general by challenging the patriarchal structures of society and advocating better social policies. It believes that practising mutual help, self-help and self-governance is a means to empower its members. Members are supposed to take charge in AH instead of the staff, as we have seen, which is unlike the practice of other social service institutions. However, AH's teachings are not without problems as we have seen.

AH provides an alternative narrative framework, and thus a different identity and self-understanding, for most members to make sense of their lives, which will otherwise appear incomprehensive if seen in terms of the dominant social ideology. However, members may not take up AH's ideology fully and in fact they negotiate with the cultural norms of the broader society by strategically and selectively accepting, contesting or rejecting the identity of "AH abused women". In fact, I have shown that AH members may not hold on to the dominant ideology and they may have their own values. In chapter four I suggested that the narrative model of AH and

that of the broader society forms a resocialization continuum on which different members are located. Some members' narrative identities are closer to AH's narrative model while some are closer to the larger society's. This continuum shows that members utilize AH's ideology in varying degrees to explain the past, articulate the present and forecast the future of their lives.

The Role Of The Researchers In Creating AH Members' Narratives

I, as a researcher and interviewer, am aware that I have had a part in constructing members' narratives. First, I have taken part in the formation of these narratives by my own presence in AH, and by inevitably interacting with my informants, such as responding to their stories in different ways, asking them questions and so forth. This is why Mattingly and Garro emphasize that the audience of a story indeed contributes to its construction; as they write, "Telling a story, enacting one, or listening to one is a constructive process, grounded in a specific cultural setting, interaction, and history" (2000: 22). Second, as Rosenwald and Ochberg point out, the plot and flow of personal stories are limited by the expectation of others, including their audience (Rosewald and Ochberg 1993: 9). I know that my informants might tell stories in ways that they thought can fulfill my expectation of doing research; therefore I tried not to give unnecessary guidance to my informants when doing interviews, though this cannot entirely remove my influence. Third, as discussed in chapter one, in this thesis I have the power to edit the stories of my informants. This more or less will condense or dilute their meanings even when I try to be truly honest with what I have been told.

All these factors make me one of the creators of AH members' narratives. However, I have tried to present honestly what I have observed in AH and what I have been told in interviews with AH members. I hope that the voices of my

informants can be truly, if not truly entirely (since the stories are always partial), presented in my thesis.

The Narrative Identity Of “Abused Women” In AH’s term

Spencer suggests that each institutional setting favors a specific way of shaping people, which is accomplished through its dominant institutional discourses (1994). AH also has its own institutionally preferable identity for its members, which is the narrative identity of “AH abused women”. It aims to transform, using Loseke’s term, “ostensibly abused women” (2001)—women with abusive experiences who do not subjectively identify themselves as abused women—into those whose identities are based upon such experience and whose narratives are framed in AH’s terms. As discussed in chapter three, AH has three levels of identity reconstruction, which lead to the increase of members’ economic capital, social capital and cultural capital respectively. The first level is to reshape members by helping them to acquire welfare; it offers an economic incentive to members so that they can claim themselves as “abused women” in AH’s terms. The second level is making members to subjectively identify themselves as “AH abused women” by creating an AH social network so that AH becomes a part of their lives. The third level is to imbue cultural capital with specific ideology to members so that they will see themselves as “abused women” in AH’s image. AH wants members to subjectively identify themselves as “AH abused women” on the basis of their understanding of and commitment to changing the inferior position of women, that is based on the third level of reconstruction. However in reality members are attached to AH for different reasons, and some are more attached to the first and second levels.

In previous chapters, I have analyzed three major aspects of the narrative

identity of “AH abused women”: social stigma that members may encounter and its management, gender and family relationships of members, and relationships among AH members, relationship among members and staff. Let me now discuss the successful and unsuccessful aspects of AH’s identity reconstruction.

The Successful Aspects Of AH’s Identity Reconstruction

Before discussing the successful aspects of AH’s identity reconstruction, let me define what “successful” means. All AH members have gone through an abusive experience, and many of them could no longer make sense of their lives with the values they earlier held. A successful narrative identity reconstruction is one in which these women have taken up an alternative “story of their lives,” so that they can reinterpret their lives and explain their experiences in a new way; it should give power to abused women, and, ultimately, help to reduce the prevalence of wife abuse.

Judging from the above three criteria, AH’s identity reconstruction is successful in some senses and unsuccessful in other senses. AH’s teachings are crucially important for many members’ narrative identity reconstruction. Lawless writes that:

They [abused women] must, it seems, sort out their life experiences in such a way that makes sense, given where they are now living.... The telling [of stories] provides a kind of recollecting of the parts of her ‘self’, a making sense of the past, a restructuring of what seem to be disparate parts of their being into the construction that is now the “I” of her voiced narrative (Lawless 2001: 6).

Since most members' abusive experience does not fit into their taken-for-granted values, such as that women should live up to the expectation of being a good wife and mother, their lives may become incoherent if seen from the dominant ideology of the larger society. The identity of "abused women" in AH's definitions provides an alternative framework for members to remember their experiences in a new way, making sense of their lives, and providing them with motivation for future actions.

For example, most members once believed that having a husband is of crucial importance to a woman, but the narrative identity of "abused women" in AH's mold has shown them an alternative way to understand the relationships between men and women, and human relationships as a whole. AH, unlike the larger society, criticizes patriarchy, and attributes the occurrence of wife abuse to gender inequality. It also challenges the idea of a "normal and intact family" which excludes family patterns other than heterosexual couples; it wants members not to lament over their loss of a "normal and intact family". Ah Yee, who has eagerly picked up AH's ideology, in chapter two said *"To me, the most important are my kids and family, like my mum, dad, sisters and brothers. Love with a man is simply one of the things that we pursue in life, but certainly it isn't the only one or the most important one."*

Second, the narrative identity of "AH abused women" helps members to fight against the oppression and abuse that they have encountered. Hirschmann has mentioned the three levels of barriers to abused women's liberty. The first and the second levels are the material conditions and subjective feelings of abused women. The third level is the social construction of meaning, that is how the society constructs the ways that men and women see themselves, what vocabularies are available for people to articulate gender relationships, what makes some social formations appear natural but not others (1994: 131). Rosewald and Ochberg echo that if we are aware of and critique the cultural limitations in constructing narratives,

not only how individuals construct their identities can be altered, but also the social order itself (1992: 2). Seen in this light, AH narrative identity not only helps members to make sense of their chaotic and threatening experience; it also contests the social meaning of abuse, as constructed by the larger society. In Hong Kong, wife abuse is seldom regarded as rooted in sexism and abused women are seen by many people as shameful. The narrative identity of AH provides members an alternative way to perceive the problem, which can potentially at some point instigate a change in social discourse, and provides a motivation for members to change the existing social order. This is exactly as Hirschmann writes:

Such reconfigured narratives and normative frameworks produce safe spaces within the larger patriarchal context. In such spaces, individual women can reclaim and rename their experiences, and this process can in turn yield a shift in the larger discourses of gender relations and the meaning of masculinity, femininity, and love (Hirschmann 1995: 135).

The Unsuccessful Aspects Of AH's identity Reconstruction

As well as a positive identity, AH has also unwittingly created a negative narrative identity for members that is debilitating and repelling. It is repelling in the sense that it blindly repels men, the AH staff and even some AH members. It is disempowering in the sense that it leads members to keep repeating their victimization in such a way that they have internalized the idea of having a powerless and impotent self; members cannot find strength and motivation in the identity of "AH abused women". Let me now delineate more fully the debilitating and repelling aspects of the identity of "abused women" in AH's terms.

The Debilitating Aspects Of The Identity Of “Abused Women” In AH’s Terms

Johnson and Ferraro (1984) point out that the victimized self of abused women is a temporary and transitory stage. When they recreate new meanings for their past, present and future, they will at the same time lessen the sense of victimization. They write:

The elation that accompanies freedom serves as a wellspring of positive action to begin a new life. The difficult tasks of finding a new home, getting divorced, and, often, finding a job are tackled with energy that had previously been directed toward “keeping the peace”. As these activities begin, however, the self moves away from victimization. Active involvement with others to obtain one’s own desires is inconsistent with the victimized self. The feelings and perceptions of self required to leave a violent marriage wither away as battered women begin to build a new self in a new situation. (1984: 128)

What Johnson and Ferraro highlight obviously does not fit into the case of AH.

Although AH members may have spent great effort in creating a new life, members’ senses of victimization often have not diminished. AH endeavors to transform the negative symbolic capital of members (see Jenkins 2002: 85)—the stigmatized label of “abused women” and “divorcees” attached by the larger society—into positive symbolic capital which enables them to have their own bargaining power for getting social welfare and public attention. In order to fight for better social policies and to get social sympathy, AH members have fit themselves into the social convention of what is “worthy” and what is “pitiful”.

Presenting members themselves as victims of wife abuse can be seen as a “weapon of the weak” (Scott 1986). AH members try to gain power and social attention by adopting a powerless and victimized image which makes their voices to be listened to and responded to more easily in a social welfare system which only gives charity to the “deserving poor”, rather than helping any of those who are in need. However, what AH members do is similar to what Roiphe criticizes. Roiphe suggests that the victimization of women in date rape and sexual harassment has been exaggerated by some feminists from the white middle and upper class in America to acquire power through a victim identity (Sorasio 1997: 137, citing Roiphe 1991). Roiphe is opposed to this victim identity; she maintains that it creates an environment of fear, that debilitates women and robs them of individual agency. Similarly, I argue that by presenting themselves as victims of wife abuse when seeking and fighting for better social welfare, members’ victimization may have been overemphasized, which makes them appear powerless and impotent; even worse, they may have internalized this victimization to a huge extent and build their identities around being a victim.

Why is members’ victimization being overemphasized and why have they internalized the victim identity? I observe that there are two reasons.

First, many AH members, especially those new members, have an “individualized concept” of victimization (Mahoney 1994: 63, citing Schechter 1982: 252), that is, when they disclose their victimization, they focus on personal misfortune, rather than locating their personal victimization within larger social and political structures. This makes members unable see any possibility to change their victimization, and they believe in their powerlessness and impotence. For example Ah Wai in chapter four said. *“Actually I feel that my family without a husband isn’t a real family. When I see people shopping with the whole family, including a husband, I*

feel regret.... Now the whole world seems to be dark and I have to bear all the responsibilities and pressures." Apart from that, because many AH members have adopted an "individualized concept" of victimization, once their personal misfortune has been redressed, they think the problem is gotten rid of and then they will leave AH. The individualized concept of members' victimization fails to show members that their personal sufferings are rooted in structural oppression (see Mahoney 1994), or to encourage them to be concerned with the collective well being of women.

Moreover, aside from the process of fighting for social welfare, members' suffering, as an "individualized concept", is continually repeated in many occasions of AH, such as Monthly Members Meeting, different focus groups, and conversations between staff and members. This contributes to a sad and debilitating atmosphere in AH. Some members may find this victimizing milieu uncomfortable. In fact members usually leave AH after a period of time, generally from a year to five years. This coincides with Hooks' argument that, "Bondings as victims created a situation in which assertive and self-affirming women were often seen as having no place in the feminist movement" (2000). She also writes that women who suffer from oppression cannot afford to surrender the belief that they have some degree of control over their own lives, for the continued exercise of this power is critical to their survival; without this power they are lost. (Hooks 2000. See also Mahoney 1994; Loseke 2001). However, it might be argued that the victimization of members serves as a means of creating effective bonding among members, and a sense of collectivity can thus be easily built. I think it is only true in the initial stage of a member's AH life because common agony initially facilitates mutual understanding, intimacy and sharing among members. However, this kind of bonding cannot last long because it fails to give strength and power to members to continue their lives.

The Repelling Aspect Of The Identity of “Abused Women” In AH’ Terms

The identity of “abused women” in AH’s mold has a repelling characteristic in terms of members’ relationships with men, other members, and staff.

First, in terms of the relationships with men, some AH members consciously or subconsciously reject any reunion with their ex-husbands; they also reject the possibility of a second marriage. Hidden behind this is the assumption that men are essentially bad and will hurt women. For instance, Ah Wai in chapter four talks about a possible second marriage *“She asked if I want to be beaten again while I still feel the pain of my first marriage. She said a man wouldn’t share parental responsibilities without reward, if I couldn’t fulfill his sexual need, he might rape my daughters. So, I quickly dismissed the idea of having a boyfriend.”* The repulsion against men as a whole creates a common enemy for members, which seemingly can strengthen the solidarity among members. However, treating men as an enemy to women is blind to the fact that men sometimes suffer, as women do, because of sexism. Men are taught to be oppressive and women sometimes can be as oppressive as men (see Hooks 2000, Hirschmann). As Hooks writes:

Separatist ideology encourages us to believe that women alone can make feminist revolution—we cannot. Since men are the primary agents maintaining and supporting sexism and sexist oppression, they [sexism and sexist oppression] can only be successfully eradicated if men are compelled to assume responsibility for transforming their consciousness and the consciousness of society as a whole (Hooks 2000: 83).

In view of this, it is inappropriate to make any generalization that all men are bad and

evil while all women are good and are victims of men.

Second, although AH emphasizes mutual help and egalitarianism, members tend to repel other members who have different opinions from their own and there are lots of disagreements within AH. I have shown there are structural reasons for these disagreements. AH wants members to formulate their narrative identity on the basis of their understanding of gender inequality, yet members may reject this. AH members argue with and repel other members because they have different pivot points in their narrative identities, which means they have different degree of attachment to the three levels of identity reconstruction in AH. Also, they have different understandings of the crucial ideas in AH, such as “self-governance”, as will be discussed in the next section.

Third, the AH staff are repelled by members, especially by those core members. AH focuses intently on the identity of “AH abused women” and the idea of self-governance, it has thus developed an intense exclusion of non-abused woman, which includes AH’s own staff. The staff are regarded as outsiders, for they do not share with members the abusive experience and they are merely “professionals”. In some sense, the staff are in a more privileged position than members because they have a higher level of education than members, as well as a deeper understanding of society. However, in AH’s setting, AH members try to keep the staff under control by selectively and sophisticatedly resorting to AH’s idea of self-governance. When the staff is obedient to members, they will be expected to lead members; but when the staff have different opinions from members, these same actions of “leading” members will be seen as disregarding members’ own self-governance. This paradox keeps the staff in a higher position sometimes and in a lower position at other times within AH. However, if AH’s mission is to fight against sexist oppression, then should it create oppression of a similar kind between its own members and staff? If

AH aims to build up an egalitarian environment; should it place staff in an oppressive hierarchy? Shouldn't the relationship between the staff and members be based on egalitarianism, just as is that among members?

To sum up, the repelling and debilitating identity of "AH abused women" makes AH's identity reconstruction partially unsuccessful, for it has made men a common enemy, created oppression and dominance among the staff and incongruity among members. This is inconsistent with AH's objectives of uniting abused women, improving the well-being of women as a whole, and eliminating violence, dominance and control.

Members' Agency VS AH's Political Objectives

Hoff remarks that abused women take charge of everything in many shelters; the role of staff and professionals are minimal. This gives abused women a sense of power and control over their lives (Hoff 1990). Similarly AH lays stress on the idea of "self governance", which means members make their own choices without interference and pressures from other people. AH maintains that wife abuse is rooted in gender inequality; it is due to the domination and control of women by men and the patriarchal society. Therefore AH advocates "self-governance" as a way to restore autonomy back to members. But as discussed in chapter five, there is an important question—Are members free to do whatever they like, including having the freedom to reject AH's teachings or should they be bounded by some ideological and moral principles? There is more than one understanding of "self governance" in AH. One of these understandings is "members do what they like" and another understanding is that members' self-governance should be practised in consistency with AH's teachings. Both of these understandings have their positive and negative sides and they together create a dilemma for AH. AH is supposed to focus on members' agency

and freedom, which has been taken away by sexist oppression. If some members are forced to do what is not their own choice by members who hold onto AH's teachings, such as joining demonstrations and participating in the women's movement, is it not depriving them of their own agency? However, if members choose of their own free will to follow the rules of patriarchal society, is their choice really a free choice? And should this choice be respected?

In terms of the first understanding of self-governance, that "members do what they like", this neglects consideration of whether or not members' choices are really free. Hirschmann points out that the choices of abused women are all social constructions because what counts as a possible option, how an option is constructed, how abused women conceptualize the problems they confront are "materially constructed through social relations that produce and constrain economic, political, and social power and opportunity" (Hirschmann 1995: 104). For example Mandy, in chapter three said,

But, this time, in 2003, the government proposed to cut the CSSA by 11.1 percent, and didn't give way even when many people protested. This makes sisters think our effort is useless, and we don't feel like joining any protest. I didn't join this year because it can change nothing. We're single parents; we join these protests at the expense of looking after our children and family.

Mandy has made her own decision in not joining the protest against the reduction of CSSA, yet her choice is not a totally free one. The rigid attitude of the government in cutting CSSA, the family burden Mandy has, and various other reasons, have conditioned her choice to not join any protest. However this does not mean she accepts the CSSA reduction. Instead Mandy's choice is constructed by the political,

social and personal constraints that she confronts. To understand self-governance as “members do what they like” may divert attention from how their choices are actually constructed and restrained.

AH has four objectives, as discussed in chapter two—unifying abused women, heightening their consciousness, collaborating with other women’s organizations, and arousing public awareness of wife abuse. The concept that “members do what they like” may mean that members’ decisions are not in line with AH’s teachings and ideology. For example, AH always organizes protests to voice their stance on abused women and women in general; however some members do not like to join these actions and are not concerned with these issues. Another example is how Mandy in chapter three bears a grudge towards new immigrants because she thinks new immigrants do not control their birth rate properly and have created a heavy burden for Hong Kong society. In her words, Mandy discriminates against women from the mainland China, which is contrary to AH’s objective of improving the status of women in general. If “self-governance” means “members do what they like”, then members cannot be coerced or persuaded into doing what they don’t like, including that which is seen as fulfilling AH objectives. The understanding of self-governance as “members do what they like” may be opposite to AH’s own aims of improving the well-being of abused women and women in general.

In terms of the second understanding of “self governance”, which is that members’ self-governance should only be practised in accordance with AH’s teachings, this means that members’ actions and choices are practising AH’s teachings, thus fulfilling AH’s objectives. However, this may threaten members’ agency if they are forced to adopt ideology that they do not believe, and forced to do what they do not like. Sally, in chapter five, talked about how members who hold on to AH’s teachings firmly impose their wills on other members who do not. She said,

“I understand sisters have their own attitude and stance, but they have to consider other sisters’ feelings. They think their decisions and suggestions are right, but they have to consider if others accept them or not.” The two different understandings of “self-governance” in AH have created a dilemma. If members do what they like, then AH’s political objectives can hardly be achieved and the external political and social constraints that hinder abused women will remain unchallenged. However, if members must practise AH’s teachings, their own agency and freedom might be undermined. Can members’ agency and AH’s objectives be preserved simultaneously? This remains unclear.

Similar dilemmas have been discussed by Hirschmann. She identifies two kinds of freedom for abused women—“well-being freedom” and “agency freedom”. The well-being freedom focuses on the “best” and the “right” choice for abused women while the agency freedom focuses on respecting abused women’s freedom to choose for themselves (Hirschmann 1994: 225). Hirschmann suggests that abused women’s agency freedom should not be undermined by choosing for them the “best” and “right” choice; abused women should not be imposed with what is thought to be for their benefit. However, she also suggests that practising agency freedom should not lead to the negligence of the well-being freedom of abused women; abused women have the right to choose for themselves, but they should also pay attention to what is their best choice. Hirschmann says both of these freedoms should be taken into account simultaneously. Abused women, she argues, have the responsibility to show each other what social, political and cultural structures constrain their choices and what is their best interest. However their individual choices, —thus their agency—should be respected even when it is not conducive to their well being. Hirschmann’s idea might not directly solve the dilemma of the two different understandings of “self-governance” in AH, but at least it may be an inspiration.

What Have We Learned From AH's Identity

Reconstruction?

In Hong Kong, there has been little research conducted on abused women, let alone on their identity reconstruction in the wake of abuse. In previous sections, I sought to objectively analyze which aspects of AH's identity reconstruction are successful and which are not. Now I want to talk about how the benefits and flaws of AH's identity reconstruction shed light on the ways that Hong Kong abused women might rebuild their narrative identity.

AH has objectives of unifying and empowering abused women, improving the well-being of abused women and women in general, and promoting gender equality. It believes that practising "self-governance", "mutual-help" and "self-help" can empower women and restore individual agency to members. However, there are discrepancies between these objectives and how AH actually carries out its work: AH wants to empower members, but has created a debilitating narrative for members by overemphasizing their personal victimization, instead of the structural roots of their victimization. AH stresses the need for solidarity of abused women, but its members argue a great deal because of their different understanding of AH's teachings. AH aims to eliminate violence against women, but it has produced dominance and control both by and over the staff. What are the implications of these discrepancies on the identity reconstruction of abused women not only in AH, but in Hong Kong society at large?

Hirschmann suggest us to identify the oppressive power in specific contexts, rather than adhering to the idea of "identity politics" and "interest groups politics" (1995: 218). We should, she argues, recognizes peoples' common concern without

assuming who they are and how their lives should be lived, at the same time, we should not see politics as rational self-interest. She said people's identity should not be regarded as uniform or all-encompassing; what benefits a person directly may not explain his or her concern for other people and for the shared social life (1995: 222). Hirschmann opposes identity essentialism and advocates concern not for individual self-interest but for others' well-being and the shared community.

Hirschmann sheds light on the identity reconstruction of Hong Kong abused women. First, she opposes identity essentialism, which may be held by some abused women towards men; for example, men are seen as essentially bad by some AH members. Her idea gives room to anyone, including men, who is concerned with abused women's sufferings, to build up a common concern for the well-being of abused women and women in general. Second, Hirschmann's idea values bonding that is based on a common concern for others' living, rather than individual self-interest or rigid identity. This encourages abused women not to focus on personal victimization or self-interest, but on the structural causes of their victimization and other kinds of violence. Third, Hirschmann suggest that we identify the oppressive power in specific contexts. Again this encourages abused women to focus structural causes of their victimization, rather than their individualized victimization. This will give them a sense of strength and motivation to create changes, as they will not see their sufferings as personal. In brief, putting Hirschmann's idea in the context of abused women, sexist ideology and the violence done by the dominant towards the dominated should be what people with different identities and interests view as important for the well-being of others and of the society as a whole. This idea allows abused women to formulate a narrative identity of strength, with a common vision and a all-encompassing alliance, instead of a repelling and a debilitating identity.

Can there be a place which seeks to eliminate violence but does not produce violence and dominance of another kind? Can we preserve, using Hirschmann's terms, the "agency freedom" of the dominated and their "well-being freedom" simultaneously? Can we fight for a political goal without creating an unnecessary enemy? These questions transcend my research, yet they are surely worthy of our further meditation. At last, concluding this chapter as well as this thesis, I would like to quote from Griffin, who writes beautifully about the emancipations of the weak from the oppression of the dominant; she sheds light on the direction of how the identity reconstruction of abused women might be accomplished:

A deeply political knowledge of the world does not lead to a creation of an enemy. Indeed, to create monsters unexplained by circumstance is to forget the political vision which above all explains behavior as emanating from circumstance, a vision which believes in a capacity born to all human beings for creation, joys, and kindness, in a human nature which, under the right circumstances, can bloom. ...When a movement for liberation inspires itself chiefly by a hatred for an enemy rather than from this vision of possibility, it begins to defeat itself. Its very notions cease to be healing (Griffin 1982)

Bibliography:

English references

- Adler Patricia A. and Adler Peter. 2003. "Deviant Identity." In Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler. eds., *Constructions of deviance: social power, context, and interaction*, pp. 229-236. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth.
- Austin, Juliet B. 1999. "The impact of a batterers' program on battered women." *Violence against Women* 5(1): 25-43.
- Brown, Judith K 1997. "Agitators and Peace-Makers: Cross cultural Perspectives on Older Women and the Abuse of Young Wives" In Aysan Sev'er, ed., *A cross-cultural exploration of wife abuse: problems and prospects*, pp 79-100. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Carrithers, Michael. 1992. *Why humans have cultures: explaining anthropology and social diversity*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chan, Kam Wah and Chan, Fung Yi. 2003. "Inclusion or exclusion? Housing battered women in Hong Kong." *Critical Social Policy* 23(4): 526-546.
- Chen, Gaoling. 2000. *Study of the Impact of Family Violence on Battered Women and their Children*. Hong Kong: Christian Family Service Center, and Department of Social Work and Social Administration, the University of Hong Kong.
- Cheung, Fanny. M. 1997. "Introduction." In Fanny M. Cheung, ed., *EnGendering Hong Kong society: a gender perspective of women's status*, pp. 1-11. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- Cheung, Fanny. M., Lai Betty L. L., Au, Kit-Chun and Ngai, Steven, Sek-yum. 1997. "Gender Role Identity, Stereotypes, and Attitudes in Hong Kong" In Fanny M. Cheung, ed., *EnGendering Hong Kong society: a gender perspective of women's status*, pp. 201-235. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- Cheung, F.M.C, De Dios, A Karlekar, M. and Vichit-Vadakan, J. 1999. "Introduction: Violence against women as a global concern." In Cheung, F.M.C, De Dios, A Karlekar, M., Vichit-Vadakan, J and L.R Quisembing, eds., *Breaking the Silence: Violence against Women in Asia*, pp. 2-12. Hong Kong: Equal

Opportunities Commission in collaboration with Women in Asian Development
& UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines

- Choi, Po-King and Lee Ching-kwan. 1997. "The Hidden Abode of Domestic Labour: The Case of Hong Kong" In Fanny M. Cheung, ed., *EnGendering Hong Kong society: a gender perspective of women's status*, pp. 157-197. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- Choi, P.K., Au, K.C., Cheung, F., Tang, C. and Yip, M. 1993. *Power and Dignity: Sexual Harassment on Campus in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- Choi, P.K., and Lee, C. K. 1997. "The hidden abode of domestic labor: The case of Hong Kong." In Cheung, F. ed., *Engendering Hong Kong Society: A gender perspective of women's status*, pp. 201-235. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.
- Chu, W.C. 1997. "Who is doing what? The implication behind housework sharing." In S.K.Lau et al, eds., *Indication of Social development: Hong Kong 1995*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong institute of Asia-pacific Studies, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- Chu, W.C. and Leung, S.W. 1995. "Gender issues reconsidered: Insights from the study of housework sharing." In S.K. Lau et al, eds., *Indicators of Social development: Hong Kong 1993*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong institute of Asia-pacific Studies, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- Clark, Candace. 1987. "Sympathy Biography and Sympathy Margin." *American Journal of Sociology* 93(2): 290-321.
- Campbell, Jacquelyn. 1992. "Wife-Battering: Cultural Contexts Versus Western Social Sciences." In Dorothy Ayers Counts, Judith K Brown and Jacquelyn Campbell C. eds, *Sanctions and sanctuary: cultural perspectives on the beating of wives*, pp. 229- 250. Boulder; Oxford: Westview Press.
- Counts, Dorothy Ayers, Brown, Judith K. and Campbell C, eds. 1992. *Sanctions and sanctuary: cultural perspectives on the beating of wives*. Boulder; Oxford: Westview Press

- Dean, Ruth Grossman, DSW. 1995. "Stories of AIDS: The use of narrative as an approach to understanding in an AIDS Support Groups", *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 17 (1/2): 163-175.
- _____. 1998. "A Narrative Approach to Groups." *Clinical Social Work Journal* 26(1): 23-37.
- Diamond, Stanley. 1981. "Paul Radin." In S. Silverman ed., *Totems and Teachers: Perspectives on the History of Anthropology*, pp 67-99. New York: Columbia University Press
- Dutton, Donald G. 1995. *The domestic assault of women: psychological and criminal justice perspectives*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Eastland, Lynette S., Herndon, Sandra L. and Barr. Jeanine R.. 1999. *Communication in recovery: perspectives on twelve-step groups*. Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press,
- Foundations, Divorce and Separation: The Outcomes for Children. 2004. at <http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/foundations/pdf/spr6108.pdf>
- Frank, Gelya. 1995. "Anthropology and individual lives: the story of the life history and the history of the life story" *American Anthropologist* 97(1): 145-148.
- Freeman, Mark. 1993. *Rewriting the self: history, memory, narrative*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Gelles, Richard J. 1983. "An exchange/social theory." In D. Finkelhor, R. J. Gelles, G. T. Hotaling, and M. A. Straus eds., *The dark side of families: Current family violence research*, pp. 151-165. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- _____. 1993. "Through a Sociological Lens: Social Structure and Family Violence". In Richard J. Gelles and Donileen R. Loseke eds., *Current controversies on family violence*, pp. 31-46. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Gilmartin, C. 1990. "Violence against women in contemporary China." In J. Lipman & S. Harrell, eds., *Violence in China: Essays in culture and counterculture*, pp. 203-225. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Goffman, Erving. 1968. *Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books
- _____. 1973. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Overlook Press.
- _____. 1982. *Interaction ritual: essays on face-to-face behavior*. Pantheon Books: New York.
- Goode, W. 1971. "Force and violence in the family". *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 33: 624-636.
- Gordon, Judith S. 1998. *Helping Survivors of Domestic Violence: The effectiveness of medical, mental health, and community services*. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Gubrium, Jaber F. 1989. "Local Culture and Service Policy." In Jaber F. Gubrium and David Silverman, eds., *The Politics of Field Research*, pp.94-112. London: sage.
- _____. 1991. "Recognizing and Analyzing Local Culture." In William Shaffir and Robert Stebbins, eds., *Experiencing Fieldwork*, pp.131-141. Newbury Park, CA: sage.
- Gubrium, Jaber F and Holstein, James A. 1995. "Life Course Malleability: Biographical Work and Deprivatization." *Sociology Inquiry* 65(2): 207-223.
- _____. 1997. *The new language of qualitative method*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2000. *The self we live by: narrative identity in a postmodern world*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2001. "Introduction: Trying Times, Troubled Selves." In Gubrium and Holstein, eds., *Institutional selves: troubled identities in a postmodern world*,

- pp.1- 22. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Griffin, Susan. 1982. "The way of all ideology," *Signs*, spring. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Haley, Shawn D. and Haley, Ellie Braun. 2000. *War on the home front: an examination of wife abuse*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Herzberger, Sharon D. 1996. *Violence within the family: social psychological perspectives*. Madison: Brown & Benchmark.
- Heyzer, N. 1998. "Working towards a world free from violence against women: UNIFEM's contribution." *Gender and Development* 6(3): 17-26. UK: Oxfam.
- Hirschmann, Nancy J. 2003. *The subject of liberty: toward a feminist theory of freedom*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Hoff, Lee Ann. 1990. *Battered women as survivors*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Hong Kong Council of Social Service. 20.06. 2004. At <http://www.hkcss.org.hk/fs/er/figures/fam5.htm>
- Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centers 2003. "Accounting for Women's Work Value in Dual Economic—Paid and Unpaid." In the 5th East Asian Women's Forum ed., *Embracing New Challenges: Women in Action*, pp. 21-24. Hong Kong: the 5th East Asian Women's Forum.
- Hong Kong Women Foundation. 1995. *Contemporary Hong Kong Family in Transition*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Women Foundation (LTD).
- Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association and Hong Kong Shue Yan College. 1982. *Needs Assessment of Working Women in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: HKYWCA and Shue Yan College.
- Hong Kong YMCA. 2003. "Single Women and Chinese Culture." In the 5th East Asian Women's Forum ed., *Embracing New Challenges: Women in Action*, pp. 201-206. Hong Kong: the 5th East Asian Women's Forum.

- Hooks, Bell. 2000. *Feminist theory: from margin to center*. London: Pluto.
- Jaschok, Maria, Miers, Suzanne. 1994. *Women and Chinese patriarchy : submission, servitude and escape*. Hong Kong : Hong Kong University Press ; London : Zed Books.
- Jenkins, Richard. 2002. *Pierre Bourdieu*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Johnson, John M and Ferraro, Kathleen J. 1984. "The Victimized Self: The Case of Battered Women." In Joseph A. Kotarba and Andrea Fontana, eds., *The Existential Self in Society*, pp. 119-130. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- _____. 1999. "How Women Experience Battering: The Process of Victimization". In Earl Rubington, Martin S. Weinberg eds., *Deviance: The Interactionist Perspective*. Rubington, pp. 56-67. Boston: Allyn and Bacon,
- Kelly, Katharine D. 1997. "The Family Violence and Woman Abuse Debate: Reviewing the Literature, Posing Alternatives" In Aysan Sev'er, ed., *A cross-cultural exploration of wife abuse: problems and prospects*, pp 27-50. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Kirkwood, Catherine. 1993. *Leaving Abusive Partners: From the Scars of Survivals to the Wisdom for Change*. London: Sage Publications.
- Kwok Pui-lan, Grace Chow, Lee Ching-kwan and Wu, Rose. 1997. "Women and the State in Hong Kong" In Fanny M. Cheung, ed., *EnGendering Hong Kong society: a gender perspective of women's status*, pp. 201-235. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- Lam, M.C. 1982. *Changing Pattern of Child Rearing- A Study of Low-income Families in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- Lawless, Elaine. J. 2001. *Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment through Narrative*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press.
- Lee, M.K. 1992. "Family and gender issues." In S.K.Lau et al, eds., *Indication of Social development: Hong Kong 1990*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong institute of

Asia-pacific Studies, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

- Leung, Benjamin K.P. 1995. "Women and Social Change: The Impact of Industrialization on Women in Hong Kong." In Veronica Pearson, Benjamin K. P. Leung, eds., *Women in Hong Kong*, pp. 22-46. Hong Kong; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Li Wei Ki. 2001. *Seeking an Ideal Wife: Why Hong Kong Men Pursue Mainland Chinese Spouses*. M. Phil. thesis, Department of Anthropology, the Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- Linde, Charlotte. 1993. *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lit, K.Y. et al. 1991. *Fatherhood in the 90's: Implications for Service Needs*. Hong Kong: Department of Applied Social Studies, City Polytechnic of Hong Kong.
- Loseke, Donileen R. 1992. *The Battered woman and shelters: the social construction of wife abuse*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- _____. 2001. "Lived realities and formula stories of 'battered women'". In Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, eds., *Institutional Selves: Troubled Identities in a Postmodern World*, pp. 127-141. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Macky, Judith Longstaff and Lo, George C.C. 1985. "Wife Battering in Hong Kong." *Journal of The Hong Kong Medical Association* (37) 1985: 23-26.
- Mahoney, Martha R. 1994. "Victimization or Oppression? Women's Lives, Violence, and Agency." In Martha Albertson Fineman and Roxanne Mykitiuk eds., *The public nature of private violence: the discovery of domestic abuse*, pp. 59-92. New York: Routledge.
- Mattingly Cheryl and Garro Linda C. 2000. "Narrative as Construct and Construction." In Cheryl Matting and Linda Garro, eds, *Narrative and the Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing*, pp 1-49. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- McCue, Margi Laird. 1995. *Domestic violence: a reference handbook*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO
- Moore, Jerry D. 1997. *Visions of culture: an introduction to anthropological theories and theorists*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press.
- Okun, Lewis. 1986. *Woman abuse: facts replacing myths*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- O'Leary, K. Daniel. 1993. "Through a Psychological Lens: Personality Traits, Personality Disorders, and Levels of Violence". In Richard J. Gelles and Donileen R. Loseke eds., *Current controversies on family violence*, pp. 7-30. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Ortner Sherry B. 1974. "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" In Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Woman, culture, and society*, pp. 67-87. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Park, Robert Ezra. 1950. *Race and Culture*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press.
- Peacock, James L. and Holland, Dorothy C. 1993. "The narrated self: life stories in process." *Ethos* 21(4): 367-383.
- Pearson, Veronic. 1996. "The past is another country: Hong Kong women in transition." In Max J. Skidmore, ed., *The Future of Hong Kong*, pp.91-103. Thousand Oaks : Sage Periodicals Press.
- Pearson, Veronica and Leung, Benjamin K.P. 1995. "Introduction: Perspectives on Women's Issues in Hong Kong." In Veronica Pearson, Benjamin K. P. Leung, eds., *Women in Hong Kong*, pp. 1-21. Hong Kong; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Profitt, Norma Jean. 2000. *Women survivors, psychological trauma, and the politics of resistance*. New York: Haworth Press.
- Roiphe, Katie. 1991. "Date Rape Hysteria". *New York Times*.
- Rosenwald George C. and Ochberg Richard L. 1992. "Introduction: Life Stories,

- Cultural Politics, and Self-Understanding.” In George C Rosenwald. and Richard L Ochberg., eds., *Storied Lives: The Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding*, pp. 1-20. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Salaff Janet W. 1981. *Working daughters of Hong Kong : filial piety or power in the family?*. Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press.
- Salaff, Janet W., Sheridan, Mary. 1984. *Lives, Chinese working women*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press.
- Sattler, Cheryl L. 2000. *Teaching to transcend: educating women against violence*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Schafer, Roy. 1981. “Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue.” In W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *On Narrative*, pp25-49. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Schechter, Susan. 1982. *Women and Male Violence: The Visions and Struggles of the Battered Women’s Movements*. Boston: South End Press.
- Scott, James C. 1986. *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sev’er, Aysan. 1997. “Introduction.” In Aysan Sev’er, ed., *A cross-cultural exploration of wife abuse: problems and prospects* pp 1-26. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Social Welfare Department. 25.06.2004. At http://www.info.gov.hk/swd/text_chi/ser_sec/soc_secu/index.html
- Sorisio, Carolyn. 1997. “A Tale of Two Feminisms: Power and Victimization in Contemporary Feminist Debate” In Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, eds., *Third wave agenda: being feminist, doing feminism*, pp. 134-154. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Spencer, Donald. 1982. *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton.
- Spencer, J. William 1994. “Homeless in River City: Client Work in Human Services

- Encounters.” In James A. Holstein and Gale Miller, eds, *Perspectives on Social Problems*, vol. 6, pp 29-46. Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press.
- Stanko, Elizabeth A. 1985. *Intimate intrusions: women's experience of male violence*. London: Unwin Hyman
- Tam, Siumi Maria. 1996. Normalization of “Second Wives”: gender contestation in Hong Kong. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 2: 113-132.
- Tang, C.S.K. 1994. “Prevalence of spouse aggression in Hong Kong.” *Journal of Family Violence* 9: 348-358.
- _____. 1997. “Psychological impact of wife abuse: Experiences of Chinese women and their children.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 12: 446-478.
- _____. 1999a. “Wife Abuse in Hong Kong Chinese Family: A Community Survey.” *Journal of Family Violence* 14(2): 173-191.
- _____. 1999b. “Marital Power and Aggression in a Community Sample of Hong Kong Chinese Family”. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 14(6): 586-602.
- Tang, C.S.K., Lee, A and Cheung, F.M.C. 1999. “Violence Against Women in Hong Kong.” In Cheung, F.M.C, De Dios, A Karlekar, M., Vichit-Vadakan, J and L. R Quisembing, eds., *Breaking the Silence: Violence Against Women in Asia*, pp.38-58. Hong Kong: Equal Opportunities Commission in collaboration with Women in Asian Development & UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines.
- Tang, C.S.K., Cheung, F. M. C., Chen, Roda and Sun, Xiaomei. 2002. “Definition of Violence Against Women: A Comparative Study in Chinese Society of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People’s Republic of China”. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 17(6): 671-688.
- Tang, C.S.K., Wong, D., and Cheung, F.M. 2002. “Social Construction of Women as Legitimate victims of Violence in Chinese Societies.” *Violence against Women*. 8(8) 968-996.
- Tang, T. and Tang, C, S. 2001. “Gender Role Internalization, Multiple roles, and

Chinese Women's mental health." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* (25) 2001: 181-196.

The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong. 1984. *Parenthood in Hong Kong: The experience of Mothers*. Hong Kong: Boys' and Girls' Association of Hong Kong.

Tutty, Leslie M. 1999. "Residents' views of the efficacy of shelter services for assaulted women." *Violence against Women* (5)8: 898-926.

Turner, Ralph H. 1972. "Deviance Avowal as Neutralization of Commitment." *Social Problems* 19 (Winter): 308-321.

Varsity 2003. At
<http://www.com.cuhk.edu.hk/varsity/>

Walker, Lenore E. 1984. *The battered woman syndrome*. New York: Springer Publication Company.

Wilcox, Danny M. 1998. *Alcoholic thinking: language, culture, and belief in Alcoholics Anonymous*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Women's Commission. 2003a. At
<http://www.women.gov.hk/eng/research/research.html>

_____ 2003b. At <http://www.women.gov.hk/eng/research/research.html>

Wyatt, Frederick. 1986. "The Narrative in Psychoanalysis" In T. R. Sarbin, ed., *Narrative Psychology*, pp 193-210. New York: Praeger.

Vagg, J. 1995. "Women and Crime in Hong Kong." In V. Pearson, and B.K.P. Leung, eds., *Women in Hong Kong*, pp. 193-214. Hong Kong; New York: Oxford University Press.

Yllo, Kersti A. 1993. "Through a Feminist Lens: Gender, Power, and Violence." In Richard J. Gelles and Donileen R. Loseke eds., *Current controversies on family violence*, pp. 47-66. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.

- 新婦女協進會 (Hong Kong: Association for the Advancement of Feminism). 2001. 《婦女事務新里程: 性別觀點主流化》(A new milestone in women's affairs: gender mainstreaming). 香港: 新婦女協進會。
- _____. 2003a. “女性時間運用研究令人失望” (The study of women's time use makes people disappointed). 明報 (Mingpao)。9月4日。
- _____. 2003b. 「時間運用」的性別政治 (The gender politics in time management) 香港經濟日報 (The Hong Kong Economic Journal)。9月3日。
- _____. 2004. 明報社評令人遺憾 (a regretful commentary by *Ming Pao*) 明報 (Mingpao)。4月19日, 頁 A29。
- 蘋果日報(Apple Daily). 2000. 四成市民歧視單親家庭 (Forty percent of Hong Kong people discriminate against single-parent families)。7月4日, 頁 A11。
- 和諧之家新家庭社區教育計劃 (Community Education and Resource Center, the Harmony House), 仁愛堂社區中心(Yan Oi Tong Community Center). 1998. 屯門區家庭暴力問題研究報告書(Research on domestic violence in Tuen Mun). 香港: 和諧之家新家庭社區教育計劃, 仁愛堂社區中心。
- 余若薇(Eu, Audrey). 2003. 正視家務勞動的經濟價值 (To acknowledge the economic value of domestic work). 明報(*Mingpao*). 9月16日, 頁 C12。
- 劉兆佳 (Lau Siu Kai) and 尹寶珊(Wan Po Shan). 1987. 香港社會指標研究的初步報告(A preliminary report on social indicators of Hong Kong Society). 香港: 香港中文大學政策研究中心。
- 羅志光(Law Chi Kwong). 2003. 家庭暴力不能容忍: 《處理家庭暴力問題建議書》(zero tolerance to domestic violence: a proposal on how to handle domestic violence). 香港: 羅志光議員辦事處。
- 梁麗清 (Leung Lai Ching). 2000. “選擇與局限—香港婦女運動回顧”(Choices and constraints: Reviewing the women's movement in Hong Kong). 《差異與平等: 香港婦女運動的新挑戰》(Differences and Equality: The challenges of the women's movement in Hong Kong), 頁 4-5。新婦女協進會、香港理工大學應用社會科學系社會政策研究中心編。
- 明報 (Mingpao). 2004a. “家庭服務檢討小組主席: 新移民福利政策是禍根”。(The chairperson of the panel on reviewing family services: policies on new

immigrants is the root). 4 月 23 日，頁 A10。

- ____ 2004b. “三成警員：夫有權打老婆”(30 percent of the police interviewees believe that husbands have the right to beat their wives). 4 月 20 日。

莫慶聯 (Mok, Hing Lueng), 陳錦華(Chan, Kam Wah), 洪雪蓮 (Hung Suet Lin). 2003. “社會福利”(Social welfare)。香港婦女檔案(Documents on Hong Kong Women), 洪雪蓮 (Hung Suet Lin), 馮國堅 (Fung Kwok Kin)編。頁 158-189。香港：新婦女協進會。

星島日報(Sing Pao Daily). 2000. “四成港人認歧視單親家庭,婦委會指情況嚴重列首要處理問題”(Forty percent of Hong Kong people agree that single parent family are being discriminated against; The Women Commission says that it's serious and should be handled with priority). 7 月 4 日，頁 A11。

- ____ 2003. “虐夫數字上升四成，家有河東獅，配偶難承受”(The number of cases of abused husbands on the increase; it's hard to put up with furious wives)。7 月 4 日。

Sing Tao Daily. 2000. “Chuan mei bao dao dui da zhong you ying xiang, Si cheng bei fang zheshi dan qin jia ting.” 傳媒報道對大眾有影響 四成被訪者歧視單親家庭 (Mass media influences the public, forty percent of interviewees discriminate against single-parent families) 4 July. A06.

吳俊雄 (Ng, Chun Hung). 2003a. “就業”(Employment). 《香港婦女檔案》(Documents on Hong Kong Women)。洪雪蓮(Hung Suet Lin), 馮國堅(Fung Kwok Kin)編。頁 12-42。香港：新婦女協進會。

- ____ 2003b.”家庭”(Family). 《香港婦女檔案》(Documents on Hong Kong Women)。洪雪蓮(Hung Suet Lin), 馮國堅(Fung Kwok Kin)編。頁 12-42。香港：新婦女協進會。

戴錦華 (Tai Kam Wah). 2000. “流行文化與女性形象再現：性別、階級與文化表演”(popular culture and the representation of women: gender, class and cultural representation)。《差異與平等：香港婦女運動的新挑戰》(Differences and Equality: Challenges of the women's movement in Hong Kong)。新婦女協進會編。頁 33-35。香港：新婦女協進會、香港理工大學應用社會科學系社會政策研究中心。

香港小童群益會(The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong). 1990. 香

港父親在家事上的參與 (Domestic participation of Hong Kong fathers)。香港: 香港小童群益會。

黃結梅(Wong Kit Mui). 2000. “情慾、自決、控制: 從性物化到性解放”(Erotism, self autonomy, control: from sex materialization to sex liberation)。《差異與平等: 香港婦女運動的新挑戰》(Differences and Equality: Challenges of the women's movement in Hong Kong) 新婦女協進會編。頁 15-18。香港:新婦女協進會、香港理工大學應用社會科學系社會政策研究中心。

香港基督徒學會(The Hong Kong Christian Institute). 2003. “新移民權利”(The human rights of new arrivals) 《民間施政報告》。民間人權陣線。頁 83-85。香港: 民間人權陣線。

香港社會工作者聯會(The Hong Kong Social Workers General Union). 2003. “社會福利政策”(Social Welfare Policies) 《民間施政報告》。民間人權陣線。頁 60-64。香港: 民間人權陣線。

屯門區議會(Tuen Mun District Board). 1991。《「屯門已婚婦女需要」調查報告》(Report on the social needs of married women in Tuen Mun). 香港:屯門區議會社會服務委員會屯門區婦女需要調查工作小組。

葉蔭聰(Yip Yam Chun). 2004. “天水圍慘劇: 性別還是社區問題”(Tin Shui Wai family tragedy: a gender issue or a community issue?). 明報, 4月23日, 頁 A40。

Background information of my informants							
Name	Status of residence in Hong Kong	Age	Educational level	Number of children	Work	Year of marriage	Year of joining AH
Hiu Man (see Chapter Three)	Came from China to live in Hong Kong 5 years ago	Mid-30s	Primary school	2	Has had no job since she came to Hong Kong; now dependent on CSSA	12 years	3 years
Mandy (See Chapter Three)	Born in Hong Kong	Mid-30s	Finished form four of secondary school	2	Has had no job since marriage; now dependent on CSSA	10 years	5 years
Ah Wai (See Chapter Four)	Came from China to live in Hong Kong 3 years ago.	Late 30s	Primary school	2	Has had no job since she divorced her ex-husband; before then, a cleaner in restaurants. Now dependent on CSSA	8 years	3 years
Ah Yee (See Chapter Four)	Born in Hong Kong	Late 30s	Finished form three of secondary	2	Has had no job since marriage; now dependent on CSSA	5 years	7 years

				school					
Sally (See Chapter Five)	Came from China to live in Hong Kong 9 years ago	About 40	Secondary school	2		Cleaner in an office; dependent on CSSA	16 years	6 years	
Ah Ling (See Chapter Five)	Born in Hong Kong	About 50	Primary school	0		NGO employee	19 years	14 years	
Shirley	Came from China to live in Hong Kong 4 years ago	Late 30s	Primary school	3		Has had no job since marriage; now dependent on CSSA	8 years	3 years	
Ah Ching	Came from China to live in Hong Kong 7 years ago	About 40	Primary school	5		Has had no job since marriage; now dependent on CSSA	13 years	5 years	
Ah Mei	Born in Hong Kong	Late 30s	Secondary school	1		Unemployed since she divorced her ex-husband. Before then, an office clerk; now dependent on CSSA	5 years	3 years	
Ah Yin	Came from China to live in Hong Kong 15 years ago	About 50	Primary school	2		Unemployed since her divorce; before then, domestic worker. Now	20 years	6 years	

CUHK Libraries



004144427